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DOUBLE-ACTION

# DETECTIVE

SEPT. 1959

MAGAZINE

35¢ P.D.C.



THE MURDER WAS  
"SOLVED"  
BUT A SEX-CRAZED GIRL  
LURED SIMON ARK INTO  
**THE CASE OF THE  
NAKED NIECE**  
**A SIMON ARK Thriller**

COULD A FRAMEWORK  
FOR MURDER BE  
BROKEN BY A  
**KILLER'S WOMAN**

*by Tom Appel*

WANTED FOR MURDER--  
A Passionate Lover

True Crime Story



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and MYSTERY stories

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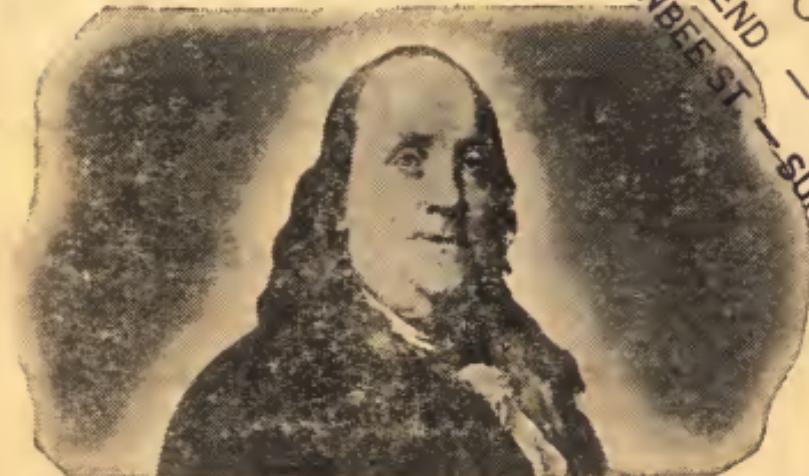
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DOUBLE ACTION DETECTIVE AND MYSTERY STORIES, Number 18, September, 1959. Published bi-monthly by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 241 Church Street, New York 13, New York. Second class mail privileges authorized at Holyoke, Mass. Single copies 35c; yearly subscription \$2.10. Printed in U. S. A.

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*A Simon Ark Adventure*

# THE CASE of the NAKED NIECE

by Edward D. Hoch

*June Fammage was a cute gal with a cute twist—every time she got upset, she tore off her clothes and ran around naked. Simon and I had been hired to keep her out of trouble with the police—but that was just the start of it...*

"**A**RK, SIMON ARK—that's who I'm looking for," the old guy said, reminding me of a walrus in mating season.

"Well I'm not him. He's inside, very busy at the moment."

"Too busy to see a client who's traveled all the way down here from Connecticut on a dirty, noisy commuter train?"

I leaned back in my chair and lit a cigaret. "Tell your troubles to the New Haven, not to me. This is a private investigation service."

"I know—private eyes. I see you on television all the time."

"I hope to hell not, Mr.—what was the name?"

"Fammage. Oscar Fammage."

"What's the business? Wandering wife?"

June leaped at the sheriff...



"No, a naked niece to be exact."

I grunted and flipped the switch on the intercom. "Simon, I think we've got a live one out here."

He cleared his throat very carefully before answering. "When you stop acting like Sam Spade, you can bring him in."

"O.K.," I told Oscar Fammage, "let's go."

The inner office of the Ark Agency was like something out of the Middle Ages. Simon and I had subsisted for our first few months of business on nothing more than an ancient desk, a battered filing cabinet and four walls. But now that the word was getting around, and the business was beginning to come in, Simon had taken to filling up odd corners with a crazy collection of curios from Lexington Avenue antique shops. To me the black brass buddha and the miniature mummy case were nothing more than junk, but I was hoping that they'd at least serve to impress Connecticut's Mr. Fammage.

"Have a seat," Simon invit-

ed after the introductions.  
"What can we do for you?"

FAMMAGE glanced from one to the other of us, apparently undecided on whether or not we were for real. I was busy playing the TV private eye, while Simon looked like nothing so much as a professor in a divinity school. He was wearing his black suit again, despite my constant lectures about it, and seemed intent on impressing Fammage with his air of studied indifference.

"My niece," the big man finally managed to mumble. "I have a terrible time with her. She runs around without any clothes on."

"That could be a big or little problem, depending on the age of your niece, Mr. Fammage."

"She's twenty-three."

"It's a big problem," I said.

Simon frowned me into silence. "Tell me about it," he urged. "It sounds interesting."

"Well, I suppose it's all in her mind. A form of nymphomania or exhibitionism, I think. She's lived with me for fifteen years now, since her parents died in an accident,

and it's really getting out of hand."

"Have you consulted a doctor?" Simon asked, and I could see our fee flying out the window.

"No." Fammage paused and then went on. "It's a bit too late for that now, I'm afraid. You see, there's been a murder and June is involved."

I SHOT A glance at Simon, but he wasn't looking at me; his wide-spaced eyes were focused on Oscar Fammage. "A murder? Then it's a job for the police. Whatever stories you might have heard about us, the Ark Agency does not intend to make a practice of solving murders."

"I don't want you to solve the murder," he insisted. "At least, not directly. I'm just afraid they'll try to pin the crime on her. Heaven knows I've tried to keep the girl under wraps—in more ways than one—but she's gotten into trouble before. She was expelled from college a few years back for her—well, habits. And this boy that was killed, Jim Elliot, was a friend of

hers. They found him in his car, in the back seat, all cut up."

Fammage cleared his throat. "The natural assumption is that he got a girl back there, she objected to it all and killed him. And as far as anyone knows, my niece June is the only girl he's been seen with lately. If it should come out about her habits—running naked around the grounds of my estate, things like that—they could charge her with the crime, or try to have her committed to an asylum."

"And you want us to...?"

"To protect her, keep the talk away from her, any way you can."

"In other words, you want us to investigate the crime?"

"No," he insisted again. "I simply want you to—well, keep her in her clothes, keep her from doing some other foolish thing."

"That should be easy," I said. "When do we start?"

"As soon as you can—today if possible."

Simon rose from behind the desk. "Very well. We'll ride back up to Connecticut, with

you this afternoon. Will that be soon enough?"

"Why—certainly. Thank you very much. Suppose I meet you both at Grand Central at two?"

"Fine." Simon shook his hand and I ushered him out. He was smiling when he left, which was at least an improvement over his entrance.

I WENT BACK into Simon's inner office and plunked down in the chair Fammage had just vacated. "Why the rush?" I asked him. "What's this guy got to make you so hot about it?"

Simon smiled a bit. "He's got an estate which means money, a niece in the nude which means fun for you, my friend, and... Well, the thing just sounds interesting."

"How interesting?"

"Interesting in that I certainly got the impression Fammage thinks his niece is guilty. He not only thinks she's guilty, but he knows a lot more about it than he's telling us."

I sighed and stretched out my legs. "After that train ride and everything, she'd better be

a beauty. I have to get some fun out of life."

"We'll see," Simon said. "Oh, and you'd better bring your gun..."

## II

I'VE NEVER really decided whether or not I like Connecticut. The dreary ride through Stamford and New Haven to New London sometimes makes me wonder, and my spirits are never improved by the conflicting sights of dismal rolling countryside on the one hand and blue, yacht-filled waters on the other. At times it seems almost as if the train will plunge into those waters, turning into a streaking speed-boat to carry you somewhere far away. But then I'm a dreamer, and this wasn't a day for dreaming. It was raining in Connecticut—a soft, endless drizzle that added to my woe, accentuating all that was dull and dim about the state. I sat back in my seat, watching Simon Ark through half closed eyes.

"Hell of a place up here, isn't it?" I said.

"I remember a few years back you always wanted to move here," he reminded me. I grunted and pretended to go to sleep.

"We get off at New London," Fammage said. "June will meet me with the car."

THE AFTERNOON was already dying when we left the train, though the summer's sun was still fairly high in the western sky. It wasn't raining here, at least, which was something to be thankful for. There was a glistening new station wagon waiting in the metered parking lot, and I figured correctly that it would belong to Fammage. For all his bulk and years, he was still a station wagon man.

And of course the girl waiting behind the wheel would be June Fammage. Almost before I got a good look at her, I found myself wondering what she would look like naked; and in my imagination I could see a slim, pretty girl with jutting breasts and rounded hips. When she left the car to greet us I got an impression of long, well-formed legs beneath her

tight green skirt. Her face was calmly pretty, like the rest of her, and she might have been some well-bred English lady for all the expression on her face when I gave her my warmest smile.

"Private detectives?" she repeated, not seeming to understand her uncle's words of brief explanation.

Simon Ark smiled his most reassuring smile. "We prefer to be called investigators, Miss Fammage. We investigate, but we do not always detect."

"You're here about the murder, aren't you? About Jim Elliot's murder?" Her voice was accusing and I could decide whether she was accusing us or her uncle.

"Only indirectly," Simon answered, making it sound more mysterious than it really was. He was the world's expert on that. Sometimes he could make a baseball score or a weather report sound like the last chapter of "*The Hound of the Baskervilles*".

JUNE FAMMAGE slid back behind the wheel of the station wagon, showing off a gen-

erous expanse of leg in the process. The rest of us piled in behind her, with Simon and me sharing the back seat. I'd expected a long ride, and I wasn't disappointed. Ninety minutes and much useless conversation later, we finally pulled into the small suburban park which was the Fammage estate. It spelled money from every direction.

Considering the fact that Simon and I had been hired to investigate, we were doing mighty little of it that first afternoon. It was supper time by the time we reached the house, and of course we had to eat. Old Fammage sat at the head of the table in an uncle-ish manner, talking about everything but the murder, and the girl picked at her food indifferently. Afterwards, Simon pulled me aside and talked fast.

"This is getting us nowhere, my friend. I want to go into town and learn something about the killing. You stay with the girl and keep her under control."

I shrugged. "She seems normal enough to me. Keeping her under control will be fun."

Simon went off to tell Fammage of our plans and I found June alone in the massive library, pouring over a volume of Jung. "Hello there. Enjoy the dinner?" she asked.

"Fine, thanks. That's real crazy reading for a girl your age, isn't it?"

"He has some good ideas in here. Much more up-to-date, really, than Freud. Did you ever study abnormal behavior?"

I DROPPED into a brown leather chair and fumbled for my cigarettes. "I spent a year at college with a queer roommate. Does that qualify me?"

"Don't try to be so funny all the time. Do you read all these private eye books?"

"Not a one. It's just that a girl like you that brings out the beast in me. Seriously, though, did you study it at school?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I was majoring in psychology before I was expelled. But that's a long story."

"Expelled? For what?"

"I told you—it's a long story."

"I'd be interested."

She sighed and closed the book. "Very well. Sometimes it does me good to talk about it." Her face crinkled a bit as she spoke, and I decided even if she wasn't the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen, she'd certainly do for most things. She had a certain charm that spoke more than her words, reminding me of all the best girls I'd crowded into my life so far.

"Almost since I can remember, I've had this crazy mental quirk," she began. "I suppose my uncle told you all about it?"

There was no sense denying it. "About your clothes?"

"That's it," she said with a slight nod. "My clothes, or lack of them. I don't know—I suppose it traces back to something in my childhood somewhere. Whenever I'm tense—emotionally upset—I have this urge to just rip off my clothes and run around naked. I know I'm doing wrong but it's something that can't be controlled."

"Have you ever seen a psychiatrist?"

"Not really. Only a quack up in Boston once who suggest-

ed I needed a love affair with a strong man who would beat me. I never went back to him. Instead I thought I could study about it in college and someday learn enough to cure myself."

"But you didn't?"

SHE SHOOK her head. "After a full year away from school, the tensions of college were more than I could bear. The first time it happened was in the spring of my freshman year. I'd been invited to join a sorority on campus and it was initiation week. What with the hazing and all I was pretty edgy. Suddenly—how do you explain it?—suddenly I lost all control of myself. I started pulling off my clothes until I was stark naked, then I tore out of the house and ran across the campus."

She frowned "I was running more from myself than from anything, I think, and of course I ran straight into the arms of the Dean of Women. She was shocked, upset, terrified, I think. She was certain it was an initiation stunt, and ordered restrictions on the so-

rority. They'd had some trouble the previous year with a fraternity making freshman go for a nude run in the middle of winter, and she thought this was more of the same. Of course the other girls were furious with me, and I had to drop out of the club. It wasn't so bad though, because just after that I started dating Jim Elliot."

"Elliot? The dead lad?"

She nodded. "I think we probably would have gotten married that next summer if it hadn't happened again. This time it was at a dance. We were walking outside, down by the beach, talking about marriage and things, and I started to tense up again. Maybe I was just afraid of sex, I don't know. Anyway, I threw myself on the sand and started at my clothes again. He fell on top of me, trying to stop me—trying to do anything he could to stop me—and that's how they found us. We were both expelled."

SIMON PICKED that moment to find us, with our heads together like a couple of shady conspirators. "Miss

Fammage, your uncle says you could drive me into town, if you'd be so good..."

"Certainly," she said, and the mood was shattered.

"I'll come along. Maybe we can stop for a drink on the way back."

Simon's look told me that was the wrong thing to say. OK, so no drinks. I followed them out and climbed back into the station wagon, catching just a glimpse of Uncle Oscar as I do so. He was standing at an upstairs window, watching us depart like some worried father overlooking the brood. By this light, or lack of it, he didn't look nearly so old, and I revised my guess on his age to no more than fifty. Perhaps he'd just had a hard life, trying to keep June in her clothes.

We dropped Simon at the main cross-streets of the little town, near a dimly-lit building that served as the county morgue. Then, as June headed the station wagon back toward home, I said, "How about that drink now, so we can finish our talk?"

In my own mind, I could rationalize this going against Si-

mon's orders, for she had been in the midst of telling me about Jim Elliot. Perhaps a single drink would be enough to bring the rest of the story out of her, to tell me more than Simon would be able to learn all night talking to some sleepy coroner in a tired morgue. Anyway, I followed her eager directions and took a different road back out of town, a road that led before long to a neonized roadhouse called *Sally's Alleys*. It was a drink-and-dance joint that had caught the bowling craze and added ten alleys in a modernized wing at the rear. We could hear the irregular crunch and clatter of the game as we sat down and ordered drinks.

"You come here often?" I asked.

"I used to—with Jim."

"Tell me about it, after you were expelled."

**T**HREE'S nothing more to tell. My uncle started keeping me a virtual prisoner after he heard. Oh, it had happened before college, of course, once or twice, but he'd put it down to some sort of childish

quirk that would pass with growing up. After the thing at the college, though, he was really worried."

"Yet he never suggested another doctor or psychiatrist?"

"No. I asked him once and he just said they'd put me away someplace."

"What about Jim Elliot?"

The girl brought our drinks and June waited a moment before replying. She seemed to have recognized someone at the bar, but then fell back into the conversation. "Jim wanted to dig into it," she said. "He really loved me, I think—probably more than I cared for him. He was intent on getting to the bottom of my troubles."

"And?" Every word had to be dragged out of her.

"And nothing. The next thing I knew he was murdered. They found him in his car, a mile or so from our house. He was in the back seat, stabbed horribly, several times. They—the sheriff said it looked like a woman's crime."

"Where were you the night it happened?"

"Well, I was home..."

"Alone?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

I grunted and reached for another cigaret. "Can you answer me one question honestly? Did you kill him?"

But she didn't answer it, honestly or otherwise. The man she'd noticed at the bar had come over to our booth, and now he spoke from behind me. "Good evening, Miss Fammage. You remember me, don't you—Mr. Bead? I was sorry to hear about young Elliot's death."

"I..." She was suddenly the color of chalk, her hands working nervously at the neck of her blouse.

I SLID OUT of the seat and stepped in front of the strange little man named Bead. "Beat it, bud," I told him. "You're annoying the lady."

"I was only talking of a death," he said sorrowfully, in a voice like a lonely undertaker.

"She doesn't want to hear about it."

"Did you ever realize that death is the most important part of life? Quite a paradox, isn't it?"

He was getting under my

skin, fast and deep. "Blow, will you, mister? Or do I have to show you the way out?"

He wrinkled up his face in a way that might have been meant to be funny or evil; I couldn't decide which. I gave him a bit of a shove that headed him toward the door and then turned back to June Fammage. I'd only had my eyes off her for ten seconds, but it had been enough. She was standing on the table, her legs apart and her face like an iceburg, tearing at her blouse.

"Get off there," I nearly shouted. "What in hell are you doing?"

She gave one long mournful scream as the blouse parted under her ripping fingers. Then her bra split down the middle and her firm breasts were bare. Behind me somebody shouted something, and a woman somewhere echoed June's scream. But I waited for no more—I scooped my arms around behind her knees and brought her tumbling down over my shoulder. She was still screaming as I carried her out like that, and her feet were vainly kicking at my stomach.

"What you need is a padded cell without windows, young lady," I told her. "It's back home for you."

### III

I DUMPED her into the front seat of the station wagon like a sack of potatoes, and for a moment I thought she was going to start on her skirt too. It was up around her waist and she was wearing nothing but black panties underneath. I tried to hold down her arms and start the car at the same time.

About then I saw the big guy blocking my path. He was standing in the glare of the headlights, looking mean, and at first I thought he must have been one of Bead's friends from inside. Then I saw the lights flicker and glint off his badge, and I knew we were in real trouble.

"What's goin' on here?" his voice boomed as he walked around to the side of the car.

"Nothing. Not a thing."

"I'm the sheriff. I say something's going on. Climb out, both of you."

"The girl's dress is ripped," I said. "She's in no condition to..."

"New Yorker, huh? Can tell by that funny way you talk. O.K., maybe you'd like it better down to my office. I'll just climb in back and we'll take a bit of a ride."

I was certain that his eyes had settled on June, and he'd surely recognized the car if not her. I had one more try at being indignant. "What's your name, anyway? I'm going to see that the governor hears about this."

But that only brought a chuckle from him. "McCoy—Sheriff McCoy. Everybody knows me, including the governor. Drive straight ahead, and no tricks. I'd got a revolver here."

I KNEW WHEN to do as I was told. He directed me through the town that was now sleepy with night, up to a white frame building that might have been more a church than a jail and courthouse. It was only a few doors from the spot where I'd left Simon, and I said a silent prayer that he was still in the neighborhood.

"Now what, sheriff?"

"Inside. You and the girl both."

"She's sick."

"Sure! I know June Fammage, mister. I know all about her sickness. The medicine for it is a night in bed with a good strong man."

"Did anyone ever call you a bastard, sheriff?" I asked him.

"Shut up and get in there!" He half-pushed me through the side door, and pulled June in after me. "Now we're goin' to get really down to business," he said, turning a desk light until its harsh glare fell on June's tear-streaked face. The office was musty and massive, like Sheriff McCoy, and the very silence of the building told us we would not be disturbed. He must have guessed my thoughts, because he added, "My deputies will be dropping by soon, so don't get any crazy New Yorkish ideas, buster."

"I just want to know what you expect to learn from this girl."

He sat down on a swivel chair that creaked under his weight and spread his fingers

wide. "What do I expect to learn? I'll tell you what I expect to learn, mister. I expect to learn how she killed young Jim Elliot. I'm just a working man and this is my job. Next election the voters won't remember how I cleaned up the drunks and prostitutes. They'll act like New Englanders and only remember that one damned unsolved murder. Do you blame me for trying to get a confession?"

I WAS STILL standing, studying the massive, wrinkled forehead. "But why does it have to be her?"

He looked at June, at the breasts still bare, at the beginning of a tear on the side of her skirt. "Tell him, honey. Tell him about your loony mother."

"No!" It was a scream from the depths of hell.

"Tell him!" He reached out one great paw and ripped the skirt down the side. The flesh of her white thighs looked suddenly cold and frightened.

"Keep your damned hands off her, McCoy!"

"Why? She's just a loony

like her mother. The old lady killed her dad in the same way, fifteen years ago. George Fammage was cut to ribbons in his own bedroom—by this gal's mother."

"I... Is this true, June?" I asked her, but there was no answer, only the thing between a scream and a sob. She ripped away the shreds of her blouse and bra, and then her skirt.

"Go on," McCoy encouraged, "take it all off. I'm not complaining."

"Where is June's mother now?" I asked.

"She's in a nut house—an asylum for the criminally insane about forty miles from here—and that's where this one belongs, too."

June was starting on the last of her clothing, the black panties that seemed somehow just then a symbol of her innocence. I didn't wait any longer. I swung from the floor and caught McCoy full in the face. He toppled backwards and overturned the chair, sprawling to the floor like some suddenly released puppet.

"We're getting you out of here," I told June. "I'll get you

a coat." I was so certain that my single blow had ended the battle that I didn't even bother with McCoy. I was half turned away from him when I saw a blur of movement behind me.

HE HAD HIS weighted blackjack out, and he caught me with a glancing blow across the temple. I toppled, trying to claw a grip onto his shirt, ripping it as I went down. "Damned New Yorker," I heard him mutter.

I was on my knees, fighting to keep my senses, when I realized that June was on him. Naked but for the sheer silk panties, she'd sprung at him like a wildcat, clawing across his face and neck with her nails, blood-red nails. I shook off the stabbing pain in my head and tried to get to my feet, but the girl needed no help.

McCoy had dropped the blackjack to protect his eyes, and now he stumbled backward, helpless before her fury. I caught the glint of a dagger-sharp letter-opener on his cluttered desk, and prayed she

wouldn't see it. I tried again to get to my feet, but my arms and legs refused to respond. There was only the irregular beating in my skull, rising and falling like a distant siren. When my blurred vision cleared again I saw that she had him over the desk, her bare knee in his groin, beating at his already-bloody face. His seeking fingers closed on the letter-opener, but she knocked it out of his hand.

I shook off the pain and shock, staggered at last to my feet, trying to stop her—but suddenly we were not alone in the room. McCoy's deputies had returned, and they were pushing me aside, tearing the girl away from the big man. They held her arms, twisting them until her fury subsided as quickly as it had come.

McCOY lifted himself from the desk, dazed and bloodied from a score of angry scratches. "The damned bitch," he gasped out. "Lock her up."

"The guy too?"

McCoy looked over at me, as if only then remembering I was there. "No, let him go."

But he walked over and said, so the others wouldn't hear, "I'm not forgetting that sock on the jaw, mister. Don't cross my path again."

"You're holding June for Eliot's murder?"

He nodded. "On suspicion. If she doesn't crack and confess, I'll still have her committed. She's plain nuts!"

He turned away from me, and I knew he had no more to say. They were leading June meekly through a doorway, out of my sight—and for all I knew out of my life too. She was too far gone for me to help, and I was only sorry I'd been the cause of her deliverance into McCoy's hands. Simon Ark wouldn't like it, and neither would Oscar Fammage...

#### IV

SIMON WAS already back at the Fammage estate, though June's uncle was nowhere to be seen. He listened calmly to my detailed account of the visit to the roadhouse, our meeting with Bead, June's actions, and the fight

with McCoy. When I'd finished, he leaned back in the chair and groaned. "My friend, you do seem to have us in a spot. We were hired to keep June Fammage out of trouble—and specifically out of the hands of the police. You have now delivered her to Sheriff McCoy on a platter."

"I know it; you don't have to tell me. Uncle Oscar is going to hit the ceiling when he finds out how I bungled it. How did you make out—learn anything?"

"I made out better than you," he said. "because I know the secret of listening rather than acting. There is a time for all things, and this early in an investigation is a time only for listening, for gathering scraps of information as squirrels gather nuts with the coming of winter. I learned a good deal about this murder fifteen years ago."

"June's father?"

Simon nodded. "June was only eight years old at the time. Nobody was ever sure just what happened, but apparently Mrs. Fammage simply went crazy one night in their bedroom. She stabbed her hus-

band George several times with a hunting knife he kept in the dresser."

"Were there any witnesses?"

"Just one. This man named Bead. He was working as a gardener and general handyman around the estate at the time. He heard the first scream and arrived in time to find her still plunging the knife into her husband's body."

"**S**O THAT explains Bead," I observed. "And maybe it explains June's reaction to him. Did she see the murder too?"

"No," Simon said. "She was apparently in another part of the house at the time. But the mother never recovered, of course. She was insane and actually incoherent, and they committed her without a trial."

"And Oscar Fammage moved into the house to care for the daughter. It's a big, fancy place. He made out plenty good."

"You have a suspicious mind, my friend. I looked into that, too. The house was left to both Oscar and George by their parents. It was half Os-

car's already, though he wasn't living in it at the time."

"Strange about this Bead character. He didn't look the handyman type to me when I saw him."

Simon shrugged. "Fifteen years can change a man."

"So what do we do now? Wait till morning and tell Oscar his niece is a homicidal killer just like her mother was?"

"No—because I still don't think she is."

"She was doing a good job on Sheriff McCoy."

"But you said she knocked a sharp letter-opener from his hand. She saw it there but didn't try to use it on him."

"So what? The girl's obviously crazy or she wouldn't be stripping down to the skin every time she got excited."

Simon pondered this for a moment. "I think if we find out just why June Fammage removes her clothes we'll have the key to this thing."

"Yeah? And who's going to tell us?"

"Perhaps... perhaps her mother. In the morning, we'll drive over to this asylum..."

SNEAKING out of the house the next morning took some doing. Oscar Fammage was up and obviously looking for his niece. When he didn't find her he'd start looking for Simon and me. But somehow we made it out to the station wagon and coasted half way down the driveway before starting the motor. Sheriff McCoy would no doubt notify him quickly enough about June, and if we were ever to visit Mrs. Fammage it had to be this morning.

For a New England morning the weather was perfect, with a hint of a breeze stirring the trees on both sides of the road. There were always so many trees in New England—or perhaps it just seemed like that to a New Yorker. Even in Westchester where I lived, the older trees were constantly giving way to express highways and home development projects.

"Did you ever think of the forest as being like a woman, Simon?"

"A virgin forest, no doubt," he answered with a bit of a chuckle.

"No, any forest, even these scattered clumps of trees."

"They have limbs, it is true."

"Oh, you're hopeless, Simon. For once in my life I'm feeling poetic and I get nowhere with you."

"It is not a poetic day, my friend. It is rather a day for depression, for gloom. See that group of buildings there? That is our destination, a quiet country spot surrounded by your beautiful trees. But it is not a happy place for all its beauty. The mind and the body can die in the most lovely of surroundings, or thrive in the most dismal."

WE TURNED through the gates of *Greenwood*, the place we sought. It was not until we were almost up to the buildings that we could make out the skillfully-designed iron gratings that covered every window. Inside, a calmly intent doctor greeted us and asked our business. We told him we wished to see Mrs. Fammage and after checking at the office he led us down a long white hallway.

"She's been here fifteen years," he said. "That was even before my time."

"Is she violent?" Simon asked.

"No, not at all. But there are definite symptoms of an overpowering guilt complex. She tried to commit suicide at least twice."

"Is her sickness the type that could have been inherited by her daughter, doctor?"

"Well...as you know, certain types of insanity are hereditary, but..."

"But what?"

“WELL, YOU must understand that I wasn't associated with the case at its beginning. It seems to me, though, that Mrs. Fammage was not insane at the time she killed her husband. It's more likely in this type of case that the insanity came on suddenly in the shock of what she'd done. She took refuge from her guilt in the shadowy corners of her mind. In that case, the same thing might well have happened to her daughter. If the daughter witnessed the crime, she might well have developed a similar mental block concerning it.”

Simon began, “But the daughter didn't...” and then

fell silent. The doctor had paused in the hallway and was opening a painted steel door. We followed him into a small white room, bare except for necessary bed, table and chair.

The woman who turned her face toward ours must have been about forty-five. She'd once been beautiful, certainly, and even now there was a hint of fire about her eyes. I could have picked her out of a crowd as June's mother, but I wouldn't have picked her as a husband-killer.

"Mrs. Fammage," the doctor said quietly, "these men are friends of the family. They've come to visit you."

"Friends?" Her eyes were questioning, vague, fuzzy.

"Friends, Mrs. Fammage," Simon said, taking her hands in his. "We want to ask you some questions."

"Questions?"

"About your husband's death."

I GLANCED at the doctor and saw that he was annoyed. We hadn't told him the reason for our visit. But he remained silent.

"I..." she began, and then fell silent.

"George's death, Mrs. Fammage, long ago. Remember the bedroom? Remember the knife?"

"No..." Her voice was soft, misty. "I don't remember."

"Did you kill George, Mrs. Fammage?"

"No... I don't remember."

"Did you know a man named Bead?"

"Bead... Yes..."

"Bead says you killed your husband."

"No... I didn't kill him..."

"What are you afraid of, then? Why won't you talk?"

But the eyes had blurred over now, and the head sagged a bit. The doctor stepped between them. "I'm sorry, I can't permit any more of this," he said quietly. "You'll have to leave now."

Simon Ark sighed and got to his feet. "Very well. Thank you, doctor."

We followed him out and waited while he locked the door behind us... Then, as we retraced our steps down the bleak white hallway, Simon asked, "Does anyone ever

come to see her? The daughter, or Oscar Fammage?"

He shook his head. "Not as long as I've been here. Neither of them have ever come. I suppose that's natural, though, under the circumstances."

"Perhaps," Simon said. "Perhaps..."

As we pulled away, I asked him, "What do you think about it, Simon? Are you doubting now that Mrs. Fammage killed her husband? Bead saw her, remember."

"Witnesses have lied before. From what the doctor tells us, I'd be convinced of her innocence if it weren't for one thing—this guilt complex of hers. If Bead really killed her husband, why should she have gone into this state of mental collapse?"

WE WERE winding down the road through the trees, making good time, when I noticed the car behind us. "Looks like someone else was at the asylum, Simon. I didn't notice that car before."

He turned his head and looked back. "Might be following us. Turn off somewhere and we'll see."

I swerved the station wagon onto a dirt road that led off to the left. We'd probably end up in some farmer's back yard, but at least we'd know if we were being followed. "Did he turn, Simon?"

"He turned. Do you have your gun?"

"Sure. You told me to bring it."

"Give it to me. We just might need it."

In the rear view mirror I could see nothing but the trail of dust we were raising on the road. I handed Simon the .32 Colt and kept going. Presently we were back on concrete, and the dust faded behind us to reveal the car coming up fast. "He's trying to overtake us, Simon. Maybe it's Sheriff McCoy."

"No, it's not a police car." We hit a bump that threw us for a moment. Ahead the road curved down and out of sight.

"This road follows the river," I said. "There's quite a drop on the left." That was the understatement of the year. We were racing along a twisting, turning roller coaster of a road that followed the wandering course of a slim little river far

below. Under other circumstances it would have been a beautiful ride. Right now it was a nightmare.

The other car was nudging our rear fender now, keeping pace with our sixty miles an hour. "Can you go faster?" Simon asked.

"Not if we want to live through it. This road is murder."

The car was pulling along our right side, crowding us nearer the edge. "I'll have to shoot him," Simon said.

"Damn! It's that Bead." I'd only seen the face once before, but I remembered it."

SIMON TRIED to wave him away with the gun but he wouldn't be scared off. "He knows I won't shoot. It's too risky to have him out of control on this road. It would probably wreck us both."

I felt my left front tire leave the concrete for a second. "If you don't shoot, we'll be dead anyway. This guy means business."

The other car nudged into our side, and I saw Bead's grinning face looking like a death mask over the wheel.

Simon saw it too, and it decided him. "Slam on your brakes at this curve," he said. "And pray."

He waved the gun once more, but Bead kept crowding. Then Simon brought the gun down, aiming at his front tire, and fired once. At the same instant I slammed on the brakes and listened to the tires screech on the pavement. Bead's car kept going past us, weaving a bit, unable to make that next turn. It plunged through the wooden guard rail, snapped off two small trees, and hurtled through space to the wandering river that waited below.

"Come on," Simon said. "He may be still alive."

We made our way down the bank, lowering ourselves from tree to tree like a couple of modern monkeys. The car was resting upright in the water, submerged to the top of the hood, and Bead was still behind the wheel. He was bent over when we reached him, bleeding badly from the mouth.

"Bead! Bead—why did you try to kill us?" Simon asked.

He rolled his eyes at us, opened his mouth wider as if to say something—but only blood

came out. The river water was almost to our hips, chilling us to the bone, but we hung on, with Simon trying to pull the door open. Then something changed in Bead's face. The faint flicker of life and hope was no longer there. Simon stopped pulling on the door and let it swing shut with the river current. There was nothing more to be learned from Bead...

## V

IT WAS PAST noon by the time we returned to the Fammage estate, and Uncle Oscar was waiting for us with fire and fury in his voice. "It's about time you two turned up! June's in jail, and it's all because of you."

But Simon Ark was calm. "Let's go inside and talk, Mr. Fammage. I think you have something to tell us."

"What? What do I have to tell you?"

"We just left Mr. Bead."

"Bead? Bead? The fellow who used to work for my brother?"

Simon nodded. "The only

witness to your brother's murder."

"Look here, Mr. Ark, I didn't employ you to dig into that old crime. I'm interested in Jim Elliot's murder and in my niece."

"I'm sure you know as well as we do that the two crimes are related, Mr. Fammage. In fact... I'd venture a guess that the same person killed both your brother and young Elliot."

"What! You mean Mrs. Fammage has escaped from...?"

"Not at all. Who *really* killed your brother, Mr. Fammage, and why did the shock of the crime drive that woman insane?"

Oscar Fammage seemed suddenly very old. "Come in," he said, "and I'll tell you everything."

WE FOLLOWED him into the library, with its great walls lined with the world's knowledge, and in this setting even Fammage seemed not quite so strong and important. "You're right, of course," he began. "Mrs. Fammage never

killed my brother. It was June..."

"June! She was only eight years old!"

"I know," Oscar Fammage said. "It was a horrible thing, enough to drive the girl's mother out of her mind. I suppose I should have told the police all about it—but I didn't. My brother's wife was already insane and ready to be committed. I saw a chance of saving the girl, at least, and I took it. I paid Bead a large sum of money to swear that Mrs. Fammage was the killer."

Simon Ark was silent. Finally he asked, "What about Jim Elliot?"

"He met June at college. He was in love with her and started investigating the old crime. I can only suppose that he learned the truth about her guilt and she killed him. I hired you two in a final effort to save her, but—now I suppose it's hopeless."

It wasn't an answer we wanted to hear. I thought of the girl I'd known so briefly, of the firmness of her young body and the sparkle of her face. Could she have killed her father at the age of eight?"

"What about Bead?" Simon asked. "He tried to kill us this morning and cracked up his car."

Oscar Fammage was shocked. "Tried to *kill* you? I can't believe it."

"Sheriff McCoy will probably come over here as soon as they find the body."

"I can only suppose he feared you would have him arrested for his part in the thing."

SIMON GRUNTED and I lit a cigaret. "We were out to see Mrs. Fammage," Simon told him.

"You were?"

"We were."

There was a car coming up the long drive, and the blinking light on top told me it was Sheriff McCoy, as expected. And in the front seat with him was June Fammage, not as expected. We went out to meet them on the porch, and I thought she was looking less and less like a two-time murderer. She was dressed now, wearing an ill-fitting cotton smock that McCoy must have furnished.

"Come in," Simon told

them. "Mr. Fammage is just explaining a few things."

McCoy gave me a nasty look and motioned June to proceed him into the house. "That's what I'm here for—explanations," he said. "I thought I'd bring along the girl and wind this thing up once and for all." I noticed he was resting his hand on his gun as he talked. Apparently he was taking no more chances with June. Or me either, for that matter.

Simon Ark seemed almost to have taken over the great library. Like a professor or a politician, he stood back against the book shelves and waited for us to settle into chairs. "Mr. Fammage, in all these books would you happen to have one on sex life in ancient Sparta?" he asked vaguely. Fammage mumbled something uncertainly.

"Oh, I have a real enough reason for asking," Simon said. "and now that we're all here—or almost all—perhaps I'll take over the explanations from Mr. Fammage here. He's just been telling us an interesting story—of how an eight-year-old girl

committed a horrible crime long ago in this house."

"June killed her old man?" McCoy asked, surprised but not shocked.

SIMON'S eyes were only narrow slits now, but I knew he was seeing everything. He'd walked over to a little shelf of bottles and decanters, and he seemed to look through the assorted wine and whiskey until he found a particular bottle. Then he turned back to us, holding a bottle of deep red wine.

"That was the problem that faced me—had June committed one or both of these murders? Almost at once there was evidence that she had not. For she made no attempt to use a knife on you last night, Sheriff McCoy, although there was the opportunity. Also, Jim Elliot apparently died because his own investigations had uncovered the truth of the past murder—if that truth was June's guilt, Elliot need not have died. He died only because he could clear June and her mother both."

"The mother didn't do it ei-

ther?" McCoy asked, shifting his gaze from Simon to the girl. He reached out and took her hand, almost tenderly. "June did share her mother's sensitive mind—and the sight of the horrible crime affected them both in different ways, the mother with guilt and the daughter with loathing."

"June witnessed the crime?"

Simon nodded. From behind his big desk, Oscar Fammage snorted. "She slept all through it. She didn't see a thing."

"She doesn't remember," Simon explained, "but she saw. And she can tell us now. I can make her tell. You've kept her away from medical treatment all these years, Fammage—and you've kept her away from her mother, too. But I can make her tell."

"Bead was the only witness," Fammage croaked.

"Bead was paid, as you yourself admitted. But not to shield the girl. The girl could have been put away like her mother. Bead risked murder this morning because he took money to shield a completely sane double-murderer. He was an accessory after the fact to

first-degree murder, and he saw us closing the net on him."

Fammage was white. "You can't pin this on me, if that's what you're trying to do. Why would I kill my brother?"

"Why?" Simon repeated. "Suppose we ask the girl."

*"She wasn't there!"*

Simon released June's hand and whispered, "I'm sorry, dear girl—but it has to be this way, just once more." And then his hand pulled the wine bottle's cork, and he was emptying the dark red liquid over her smock.

SHE SAW it, and her face contorted in a final fury, her voice split the air with a startling shrill scream. Then she was ripping at her clothes, tearing them from her body, freeing herself from the horrible redness of the stains. And gradually her screams became words. *"Uncle Oscar! Uncle Oscar is killing my daddy!"*

And she tore away the final wisp of cloth from her body, still screaming at her father's murderer. And it was a woman's body contorted with a child's helpless voice, a voice

from the depths of the soul.

"Cover her up, Sheriff," Simon said. "I hope now she'll never have to tear off those blood-stained clothes again."

Oscar Fammage started to rise, then fell back in his chair. "I...the girl is crazy."

"She needs care—care you should have given her years ago, Fammage, instead of keeping her and the secret locked in this house. Elliot tried to help her, and I suppose he learned the truth from Bead. So he had to die too, to cover your horrible secret."

"But why, Simon?" I asked. "Why did he kill his brother?"

**T**HIS EVIDENCE is circumstantial but strong. Mrs. Fammage was driven to insanity by her supposed guilt, and the murder was committed in the upstairs bedroom. The motive? It's not too fantastic to believe that George Fammage walked into the house and found his brother and his wife in bed together. The shouting brought little June in time for her to witness it all. Oscar seized the knife and stabbed his brother to death. It

would be enough to derange any child, with the blood spouting onto her clothes. It was enough to drive her mother insane with guilt—not guilt for the murder, but guilt for the adultery that caused the murder."

"No wonder he never went to visit Mrs. Fammage," I breathed, turning toward the man behind the desk.

And then he moved. His hand came out of the desk drawer, and if it had held a gun he would have had us all. But he was true to the knife, and the glint of its blade held us for only an instant. Then Sheriff McCoy fired from the hip, and Oscar Fammage twisted dying out of his chair, rolling on the carpeted floor and staining it with his blood.

McCoy walked over and kicked gently at the body. "Damn," he said, to no one in particular. "And there's a man who would have voted for me..."

**T**HIS TRIP back to New York seemed the longest in memory. Even the sight of the dying sun through the trees

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# KILLER'S WOMAN

by Tom Appel

*Complete Novelet*

*The men in this town were hostile—very hostile to Herb Trent; but not the women. One gal was willing to give him anything—anything at all—if he stayed. Another was ready to give him everything—but everything—if he'd leave. But Bill Zorn and his cronies just wanted to give Trent the works...*

I WAS NEAR noon when Herb Trent dropped off the Chicago sleeper at Rayburn, Tennessee. It proved to be a typical coal mining town. A cluster of ratty business places about the dingy station. Tobacco-spitting loafers who gave him unfriendly stares.

Houses straggling along both sides of the one thoroughfare. The village lay huddled against the foot of a mountain, so steep, that twilight fell over the place each day at three. Carrying his bag, Trent walked toward the three-story frame hotel two blocks away. Passing



a storeroom, separated from its neighbors by weed-grown patches on either side, he read upon its dirty window the sign: **UNDERTAKING PARLOR**

Probably the only one in town, he thought. The owner's name would be Jensen. Moved by a reckless impulse born of dislike for the village, and for the case upon which he had embarked, Trent went into the establishment. There was no one in sight. He raised his voice in a preemtory call.

"Anybody here? Where's Jensen?"

A WIZENED man in faded black shambled out of a back room. Without looking directly at Trent, he said, "I'm Jensen. What do you want?"

"How much do you get for laying out a stiff?"

"Who's dead?" Jensen's startled glance flickered about the room.

"Never mind that. I'm asking you, how much?"

"Depends on the casket. Maybe...three hundred?"

"How much if the guy happened to be murdered, with a little fixing up to keep the fact covered?"

Jensen began to edge away, his sallow face greying. Harshly, he blurted: "You must be crazy. Get out! I'll call the police..."

"How much did you get for laying out James Wallig?"

The undertaker recoiled as though Trent had dealt him a physical blow. Face distorted, he screamed, "Get out of here! I don't know what you're talking about. I'll call..."

"Shut up! I only asked you a question. Did you get paid extra because Wallig was murdered?"

"It was an accident! Everybody knows that. And, if you start any talk about me, I'll have the law on you!" Then, he added vindictively, "You're building plenty of trouble for yourself, mister."

Herb Trent turned toward the street. "I'm *looking* for trouble," he growled. "And one glimpse at this burg tells me I'll find it." He opened the door.

"Wait," gasped Jensen, suddenly. "Who are you?"

Departing, Trent gibed, "Sit awhile, friend—you'll find out."

HE WALKED on toward the hotel wondering just why he had awakened that morning with the idea that the man he sought was a murderer as well as a thief. Perhaps the belief was bred of something his client had hinted at. Certainly of nothing Clarence Wallig, son of the late James Wallig, had said.

Trent's mind turned back to events of the previous day when he had answered Wallig's call. A housemaid at the door said, "He's confined to his bed. His heart, you know."

The bright-eyed miss regarded Trent's blond good-looks and rugged physique approvingly. "He told me to bring you straight in. If you'll come this way..."

Clarence Wallig wasn't exactly in bed. Clad in a crimson dressing gown, he lay with his bony six foot plus stretched upon a couch beside a bedroom fireplace. A small blaze took the edge off Chicago's chill spring air. Offering Trent a limp hand, the young man said, "Sit down, please. I'll tell you about the job I want done. But first, can I trust you. It's a very confidential matter. You

understand there must be no talk!"

"Our firm, Trent & Kilbourne, has a pretty good reputation," Trent snapped, instinctively disliking the fellow. "If you're in doubt, get some other detective agency. We're rather busy."

"**N**Ow, DON'T be like that." Wallig gestured impatiently, his petulant scowl making a deep furrow between black, bushy brows. "You're in the headlines enough, lately, so that I know quite a bit about you. Your 'reputation' is for fast shooting and few questions. That fact had something to do with my calling you. I need somebody who'll get action."

"What sort of action? We don't go around shooting people for pay." Trent's level gaze was cold. "No divorce cases, no digging up dirt in heart balm suits. My agency specializes primarily in business frauds and...murder."

"Well, this is a business fraud! I suppose you know," Wallig said, "that I inherited the Acme Coal Mining Company when my father was ac-

cidentally killed in Tennessee several months ago? It was in the papers."

"I may have seen it. So what?"

"When they shipped his body back to Chicago, along with personal property and papers, one document was missing. A formula of great value. I think the mine manager stole it."

Then, Trent grew interested. This was more in his line. Bad breaks on several recent cases had forced him to do some ruthless killing. He disliked the notoriety resulting from lurid newspaper accounts. "I believe we can handle a matter of that sort for you," he said. "What was the nature of the formula?"

CLARENCE WALLIG lighted a cigaret, took a drag and tossed it into the fireplace, complaining, "I'm not supposed to smoke. Ticker has gone haywire; that's why I can't personally go down and investigate. My father had a formula which outlined the usage of one of our waste products—coal dust—with chemicals to produce a very hot-

burning, inexpensive industrial fuel. Really a marvelous thing! The mines are running only half-time, now, because of high costs and low prices. With that formula we could operate full-time and at a substantially higher profit."

"I see," Herb Trent nodded. "Now, just what sort of an accident caused your father's death? Any suspicion of foul play?"

"Oh, no! None at all! He was down in one of the shafts performing an annual inspection of the mine when a big rock became dislodged and fell upon him, crushing his skull. Not an uncommon type of mine accident, Mr. Trent."

"Why," Trent asked. "do you suspect the mine manager more than anyone else?"

"Because he, Bill Zorn, is the only one outside of my father and myself who knew about the formula!" Wallig exclaimed. "He's the only person in Rayburn who'd understand the nature of the chemical data."

"Ever have trouble with Zorn—of a personal nature? You or your father? Anything to cause bad feelings?"

"No—but I see what you're driving at. Bill Zorn is a hard man, accustomed to ruling a gang of miners with fists, clubs, or guns, depending upon the needs of the moment. He's the type who'd stop at nothing to get ahead. Actually, I'm half afraid of him," Clarence Wallig confessed. "That's the way he affects a lot of people."

**"T**ELL ME this," Trent said, "to complete the picture. Approximately how much is the mining property worth. And, incidentally, what do you pay Zorn?"

"The mine is valued at about three million. Zorn draws twenty thousand a year, ordinarily, but he goes on somewhat smaller pay when the mine is not running at capacity."

Wallig's grin was nasty. He continued, "I know what you're thinking. If such a man saw a chance to clean up a fortune, he'd grab it. Just as you or I would."

"Speak for yourself," Trent said drily. "You must have received certain official papers and statements when your father's body was returned. From the coroner, the doctor,

undertaker and so on. I'd like to have a look at them before I leave. Can I pick them up tomorrow?"

From a pocket in his dressing gown Wallig pulled a thick envelope and tossed it to Trent. "All there. Take 'em along. I knew you'd need them. And, I want you to go today. I'm worried. Zorn might sell that formula. The Atlanta plane will stop at Rayburn to let off passengers. Special arrangement of my father's. Costs a bit more but I'm paying the expenses. Acme maintains a small landing field there in the mountains. You could catch the afternoon flight." Wallig glanced at his wrist watch. "It's only eleven o'clock."

"Nothing doing! Sorry—but we don't just sit around like firemen awaiting a call. I've work to go over with my partner. We'll finish up this evening. I'll take a sleeper and be there in the morning. Satisfactory?"

**W**ALLIG agreed—reluctantly, Trent recalled now, as he approached the Rayburn Hotel.

He also remembered the

man's air of reticence—his nervous warning at the moment of leaving, when he blurted, "Look out for Zorn! He's dangerous. If he thought you were onto his trail, he'd kill you. And, get away with it, too. He controls that town!"

"Much obliged," Trent had grunted. "It wouldn't surprise me to find that there's more than a theft involved in this case. Just a hunch... I'll let you know how it pans out."

Trent stopped abruptly in his tracks and a smile began to play about the corners of his mouth as he recalled another event of that day—a more pleasant one. It had occurred while he was walking down a narrow hallway leading away from Clarence Wallig's room. A door to the left and in front of him opened quietly, after which a bare, well-shapen leg stretched slowly out across the passageway, blocking his way. As he drew closer, a hand also appeared, grasping him lightly by the sleeve, leading him into a dimly-lit room—and thence into a passionate embrace.

He didn't struggle. The girl, whoever she was, seemed sincere in her amour. The soft,

soapy fragrance of a body recently showered, beneath thin material of a dressing gown, stimulated him and, without introduction, he returned the embrace. Whispers of desire seemed to echo through the cubby-like room while the sun, slipping in between the curtains, cast weird shadows on the walls and floor.

"Well! What next?" Trent inquired, finally, out of breath.

"What do you think is next?" the girl replied softly, deftly unfastening the buttons of his shirt beneath his coat. "I'm surprised that you ask."

**TRENT PUSHED** her hands away and stepped back several paces to the window. He opened the drapes. Clad in a filmy negligee, it was the bright-eyed house girl who stood before him. She pouted at him, apparently upset by his action. But then, as another thought seemed to strike her, she smiled and began to move toward him. Her gown was not fastened at the front and Trent nodded approvingly at the view disclosed to him as her slow strides brought her nearer.

"Some people like to make

love in the daylight," she had teased, coyly. "I like the dark myself. But because I like you—I don't really mind, one way or the other."

For a house maid, Trent thought, Clarence Wallig had done all right for himself. He told her so.

At the mention of Wallig's name, a grimace of disgust overspread the girl's face. "A job's a job. And don't be so damned smart."

She retreated to the window, standing with her back to him, meditating. The sun, outlining her softly rounded figure beneath the sheer dressing gown, showing curves and dark recesses of a voluptuous sort, caused Trent to shift uneasily in his position—and he breathed harder. The girl's next words reiterated a thought which already was in his mind.

"You may have done better in your life, Mr. Trent," she had whispered, moving back toward him, "but not too much." These last words were put more as a question than as a statement of fact. "A girl—a girl like *me*—needs more than a broken-down heart case like Wallig. Will you—Mr. Trent?"

With this last statement she retraced her steps to the window and flipped the drapes closed. Although the lighting, again, was dim, Trent saw her dressing gown slip to a silken pile at her feet. The next moment she again was busy with his buttons.

**WELL, THOUGHT** Trent, here he was in Rayburn with his hunch about Wallig's death growing stronger. Too early to jump at conclusions but there was one way to bring a tough guy into the open and that was by putting him on the defensive.

Undertaker Jensen, whether innocent or guilty of participation, would have gone running to Zorn or telephoned him immediately. Probably the hotel man would do the same if properly roused. Trent walked into the deserted lobby and dropped his bag.

A pimply-faced clerk lounged behind the shabby desk. From the dining room came the clatter of dishes. Luncheon was being served. Trent registered and said, "I want the room that James Wallig occupied several months ago...the man

who was murdered down here."

The clerk jumped as though he was shot. "Why'd you say that?" he gasped. "Wallig got killed by accident in the mine. Who are you, mister?"

Trent spun the register and pointed to his name. "Can't you read? Or shall I spell it out for you? And what's the price of that room?" He glanced at the sign above the desk. "Three dollars. Where's the key?"

**T**HIS CLERK turned and began nervously fumbling at a rack whereon keys were hung. "Number 210," he mumbled. "You wouldn't by any chance be a detective, would you?" he asked suddenly.

"Would I?" Trent glared at him.

"Well..." The clerk leaned across the counter to check Trent's luggage. "One bag? Shall I carry it up for you?"

"Never mind. I'll take it, myself. No elevator, I suppose."

"Right up those stairs." The clerk pointed. "To the left at the end of the hall."

Upon a landing at the top of the first flight Trent paused

and looked back. The clerk was eagerly whispering into a telephone. Glancing over his shoulder he saw Trent watching him and hung up abruptly. Sprawling back in his chair he yawned with an obviously feigned air of boredom.

Trent scowled and went on to his room.

"I'm not going to like this town even a little bit," he muttered. "If I'm right about that murder hunch I'll soon be having a caller."

## II

**T**HREE WERE about a dozen people in the dining room when Herb Trent came down for lunch. Two pasty-faced salesmen sat together near the doorway talking overloudly of business done that morning. A large table in the center of the room served, evidently, as a gathering place for local workmen. Three of them—in shirt sleeves and not appearing very clean—lingered there and leaned toward each other in low-voiced conversation. Their eyes sought Trent the moment he entered the room, but each man looked

away quickly. Trent gave them but a passing glance, closely regarding the one diner who roused his interest.

The girl was beautiful in a foreign sort of way. Quite young. Blonde hair approaching platinum in its lovely paleness. Complexion like cream. Large blue eyes in a face at which Trent looked twice before he caught the subtle marks of hardness hiding behind an innocent exterior. He thought she might be Alsatian. He started toward an empty place near her but a waitress intervened.

"Let me seat you over here, sir."

"I want to sit there." He gestured. "Near the windows."

"Please!" the serving girl pleaded. "Sit over here—at my table."

Trent gave her a narrow-eyed look but obeyed...only he took a chair opposite the one she had drawn out for him, so as to sit facing the door. There was no mirth in his tight smile when he said, "Somebody told you to place me. Why?"

"Oh, no! They didn't...Will you order, please?"

She laid a fly-specked menu before him.

TRENT FOUND the food unsavory and finished his meal quickly, but lingered over a cup of coffee that was not too bad. Looking out through an archway that led to the lobby he could see, reflected in a large mirror which hung at a slight angle, people who came and went.

A man walked up to the desk clerk and addressed him. They both stared at Trent's image in the mirror, saw him watching and turned their faces away. Trent muttered, "Ten to one that's Bill Zorn. Come to look me over."

There was power in the broad back, the barrel-shaped torso, and ruthlessness in the heavily molded jaw which Trent could see in profile. The clerk's cringing air, evident at this distance, proved the newcomer a person of authority.

Trent nodded, thinking, *It's Zorn, all right. Well—the hell with him! Let's see if he'll make the first move.*

The pretty blonde girl sat behind him. He could not see

her without turning half-around. The nervous little waitress came to his side, swept her hand across the tablecloth as though brushing crumbs away. She left a tiny folded wad of paper lying there. Trent closed his fingers upon it, murmuring, "From whom?"

"We have apple and blueberry pie, sir." The girl's voice lowered momentarily. "*Don't ask questions.* Which will you have? And, can I bring you more coffee?"

"All right." Trent smiled into her frightened eyes. "Bring the blueberry."

He unrolled the wad, keeping it covered with his hand. The writing was daintily feminine.

*You'll be killed if you don't get out of town quickly. Tell the clerk you are taking the first bus.*

TRENT SLID his chair around a bit so that he could see the girl with the blonde hair out of the tail of his eye. She was not looking at him. Leaning with elbows on the table, chin cupped in her palm, she stared through a window toward the street and

toyed with a spoon and coffee cup.

Trent got up and walked toward her, passed her by, and stood peering through the window. His whisper was so low that it could reach no ears but hers. "May I sit with you?"

The men lingering at the large table were eyeing him sullenly. He sauntered back past the girl and heard her murmur angrily, "Keep moving you fool!"

He kept moving—on out of the dining room—and met the waitress returning with his pie. Handing her two dollars, he said, "Save it. I've had enough. Keep the change."

Pausing at the desk Trent selected a cigar from an open box, flicked a match with his thumbnail and laid down a quarter. The clerk handed back ten cents, saying, "I'll bring your bag down and drop it at the bus stop for you—next door to the drugstore. One leaves for Knoxville in a couple of hours."

"Much obliged," Trent retorted. "And when you do, I'll break your damned neck! Bill Zorn won't do any worse, will he?"

The clerk's face grew mortified. "I don't know what you mean. I thought you said something about checking out..."

**TRENT SAUNTERED** to the street, blinking in the bright sunshine. At the curb stood a dark colored sedan with a man at the wheel. The rear door of the car was open. Two blue-shirted fellows in shapeless jeans, standing on either side of the hotel doorway, stepped in behind Trent as he passed. The thin one, unshaven and nearly chinless, said, "Here's your car, sir. Get in!"

They made little attempt to hide the revolvers that were thrust into their waistbands. Trent saw that the street was clear of people. He sneered, "A couple of hick hoods. I wonder just how fast you are with that hardware. Even odds I can take both of you..."

"Don't try it," the swarthy one snarled, hunching muscular shoulders as his fingers tightened upon the gun. "Besides, the boss wants to see you."

"Zorn? I want to see him, too."

**TRENT GOT** into the car. The chinless fellow dodged around to the opposite door and opened it. The pair climbed in simultaneously, guns drawn covering him. As the sedan lurched away from the curb they jerked Trent's revolver from his shoulder holster and frisked him for other weapons. He was mildly astonished at the speed and thoroughness with which they did the job.

"You go at that as though you'd had plenty of experience. I take the 'hick' part back."

"Stow it!" snapped the swarthy one. We've handled your kind before."

"Just killed them off, I suppose," Trent commented. "Like James Wallig, maybe?"

"Keep on talking like that, wise guy, and you'll wind up in a hole in the ground." The speaker looked at his companion. "Shove that rod up under his armpit, like I showed you. Then there ain't no chance of tricks."

Trent grunted as the gun barrel gouged beneath his arm. Gritting his teeth, but with a jesting air, he inquired flipantly, "I suppose this is what

the underworld commonly refers to as a *ride*?"

"How I wish it was!" The chinless one's grin displayed stained and broken teeth. "I don't know why it ain't. But you just keep talkin', an'..."

"Shut up!" the other snapped. "You talk too much, yourself. Here's the house."

TRENT SAW that they were approaching a dwelling larger than other houses in the block. A man came down from its porch as the driver braked the car to a halt at the curb. The same burly individual he had seen at the hotel. Getting into the front seat, he said, without turning his head, "I'm Zorn. You're here to check up on Wallig's accidental death. I'm going to fix it quick and easy for you. The temper of this town, right now, makes it unsafe for strangers. I want you out as soon as possible."

"We'll see about that," Trent grated. "In the meantime, tell these punks to quit gouging my ribs with their damned guns, or all hell's going to break loose."

"Guns?" Zorn twisted in his seat, smiled mockingly. "Why,

Shell! Harry! Is that any way to treat a visitor? Put your weapons away."

"And hand back my rod," Trent snorted.

"Well..." Zorn settled himself and looked forward again. "Maybe it's better if we keep it." To the driver, he said, "Get going. Take us to the mine."

"For another accident?" Trent queried amiably.

"That's a crack I don't appreciate," Zorn said. He turned again and stared at Trent. "Wallig died accidentally, no matter what you think. The official reports should satisfy anyone of that. I can't think of a good reason for your snooping, but I'm going to show you everything, let you talk to everyone concerned, and then I want you to get the devil out of here before something happens. As I told you—people are on edge around here, mine half closed down and all. So play it smart, flatfoot."

THE MINE lay near the east side of the village. A cluster of the usual drab buildings, strings of rusty cars and the dark maw opening out of a hill.

Zorn alighted when they stopped, and said, "We'll talk to Doc first. He's across the way in his office. Then we'll go down to the place where the falling rock struck Wallig. You'll see how easily it could have happened and maybe you'll be satisfied. If you hadn't scared hell out of Jensen, the undertaker, this morning he'd have answered your questions straight enough."

"Maybe," Trent said, skeptically.

In a small frame office near the mine entrance a Doctor Baines was waiting. He started talking the moment they entered as though primed for it—a squat, bald man with reddish eyes and sagging jowls.

"About Wallig's death—I examined him carefully. He was dead when they hauled him up. Skull crushed by a falling rock which became dislodged when he pulled at some loosened timbers. My report was all in order..."

"Forget it," Trent said. "Zorn! Let's go down and look at the place if that's what we came for."

"I've got to hurry back to town," the doctor said, nerv-

ously. "Obstetrical case. Woman in labor..." He scurried out.

"Meaning," Trent growled, scowling at Zorn, "that he wants to be in the clear in the event another *accident* occurs."

"You're a damned fool," Zorn said without heat. "It's to my interest to see you out of here quickly, safely and satisfied. Try to digest it that way, huh?"

THEY WALKED down into the mine as no cars were running. Electric lights burned at intervals along the main tunnel. Perhaps two hundred yards from the entrance, in a side gallery, Zorn pointed to broken planks at the top of the shaft.

"The rock fell from up there. Wallig was standing just about where you are now. He shook these timbers..." Zorn gave a pull on one of the planks. There was a sharp crack followed by a low rumble as a heavy boulder, dropped out of the opening. Zorn, with a cat-like swiftness, swept Trent aside with a powerful swing of his arm. The rock,

crashed within inches of their toes.

"My God!" he gasped, "If I hadn't grabbed you..."

Stepping back, Herb Trent mopped cold sweat from his brow. "Yeah—close," he muttered, skeptically, anger welling up into his throat. "Well—much obliged, anyway. I suppose that's the end of the demonstration?"

"All right, all right," Zorn growled impatiently. "Say I rigged it if you want to. But, that's what happened to Wal-lig."

They drove back to town and stopped at a drugstore which had a bus station sign in the window. Zorn stayed in the car. The two men, Shell and Harry, got out with Trent. Zorn said:

"Your bag's here. The bus will be along in ten minutes. Take it! And..." His stare at Trent seemed more worried than menacing. "Be smart, flat-foot. Don't come back. You've had your break."

### III

**A** DIRTY-FACED urchin handed Herb Trent a baggage check, pip-

ing, "It's inside, Mister. I brought it over. Gimme a dime."

Trent gave him two bits and started indoors, saying, "I'll get it."

The pair with the pistol butts still visible in their waist bands lounged on either side of the doorway, waiting to see that he got on the bus.

Trent retrieved his luggage, walked to the soda fountain and ordered a coke. While it was being mixed, he stepped out through a side door and strolled back to the hotel. In the lobby he saw the blonde girl talking to the clerk. She wheeled. Fright whitened her cheeks. She hurried past Trent. He said urgently, "Wait!"

But, the girl sped away.

Trent went to the desk and poked a blunt finger against the clerk's chest. "I didn't check out. I didn't pay my bill. I want that room back. And I want to know who that girl was."

"You want just about everything, don't you, Mister?" The clerk had found courage somewhere, and his tone was insolent. "Well, I reckon you'll get it. You sent for your bag, a fel-

low paid for your bill, and the dame's name is Mary Lazur. Don't make no passes at her though because she belongs to somebody else. You know the way up to the room."

"Who does she 'belong' to?"

"I ain't sayin'—but any dame as good lookin' as that belongs to somebody. I'm just tellin' you. And I might add, while I'm at it, that you're plum out of your head! Bill Zorn *owns* this town."

THE CLERK went from behind the desk into a rear room and closed the door. Trent was puzzled. Did Zorn own the girl, too? He doubted it. Why would she have warned him? He was sure it was she who had sent him the note. Her loveliness, blossoming like a pastel bloom amid the squalor of that mining town, got under his skin.

"She's scared as hell," he grumbled, reaching for his room key on the rack. "Somehow, I've got to talk with her."

He climbed the stairs, wondering what Zorn's next move would be. More than money was in back of the man's anxi-

ety to hang onto the missing formula. Trent opened his bag when he reached the room and looked for his spare gun. It was gone. He was not surprised. Shrugging, he stretched himself upon the bed and relaxed in thought. Perhaps ten minutes had elapsed when he was roused by a woman's whisper. He turned his head from side to side, trying to identify its source.

*"Trent! Listen! Do you hear me?"*

"Yes. Where are you?"

*"Get out! Zorn gave you your chance. He doesn't want you killed. There's another bus this evening at ten. Tell the clerk you're taking it. Before something happens..."*

The muted voice seemed to come from out of the walls.

*"Mary Lazur? Is that you?"* Trent asked.

There was no answer. He heard the slight creak of a board overhead and glanced up at the ceiling. Blue wallpaper printed in a geometric design. Yes, there was a hole where a round dot should have been. A hole through which one might spy upon an occupant of that

room—through which one might whisper.

He sprang up and started toward the door. Footsteps pounding in the hall outside halted him. Someone knocked, saying, "It's Zorn. Open up."

TRENT LET him in. The man's hard face was set in a bitter scowl. He growled, "Why didn't you leave? Like I told you."

"I don't do anything because people tell me." Trent gestured toward a chair. "Sit down. We may as well have this out. I want that formula."

Zorn's eyes narrowed with curiosity. "What formula? What are you talking about?"

"Wallig's formula. It wasn't returned with his other papers when you shipped his body back to Chicago. And get this, Zorn. The day and hour you try to peddle it or work it, I'll nail you with Wallig's murderer."

"Who sent you?" Zorn's face was twisted in a frown of concentration. "Just who's behind a fairy story like that?"

"I'm not answering questions today," Trent said. "Wallig had discovered something—

a new, extremely hot burning industrial fuel—he set it down on paper. It's missing. You took it. So..."

Zorn got up and paced the floor. "There's more behind this than you know. James Wallig *had* some such notion in his head, as I recall, but he never got it figured out right. He may have talked to somebody—maybe even tried to interest some chemical outfit in further research. But a formula—no! He'd have told me about it if ever it had been perfected." There was no heat in the man's voice. He paused to stare at Trent searchingly. "Did some chemist or some mining competitor hire you?"

"This is growing monotonous," Trent said wearily. "Wallig had the formula. No doubt he did tell you about it. You framed an accident, killed him or had him killed, and took the missing paper. Hand it over and I'll get out of town. I won't bother you if I get what I came after. But if I don't, I'll just naturally raise hell."

ZORN STALKED to the door, his pale eyes expressionless.

"I haven't got what you want. I don't know, yet, what's behind all this. But you'll get out of town, and you won't raise much hell..."

Someone knocked. Herb Trent opened the door. A boy stood there with a telegram in his hand. Trent said, "Any charges?"

"It's for Mr. Zorn."

Zorn took the envelope, ripped it open and read the message slowly. He sucked in a great breath of air, pocketed the yellow paper and turned bleak eyes toward Trent.

"This clears things for me. You're just a lousy private dick out to 'raise hell' as you put it, for a price. I'm going to show you what 'hell' really is, and I won't charge you a cent!"

Zorn tramped down the hall, his mouth grimly set. Trent locked the door and stretched himself upon the bed, muttering irritably:

"The whole damned thing is crazy. That guy was puzzled in the beginning. But, something in the telegram gave him a new angle. I wish I knew what..."

He jerked himself erect

when the woman's voice sounded again from above the room.

*"You've got to go! There's something all wrong. I don't know what. But you'll be shot, the same as the old man."*

"Shot!" Trent was easing the key into the lock. "Did you say shot?"

HE YANKED the door open, dashed for the stairs and ran up to the next floor—room 310. The door was unlocked. The room, although showing signs of feminine occupancy, appeared vacant. Beneath the rug he found a hole drilled in the floor. An eavesdropper might use it for listening, he thought, but the small aperture gave scarcely any view of the chamber below.

A rustling noise behind him made him wheel about with catlike haste. He was greeted by the open maw of a .45 caliber automatic. Behind the gun, dressed in feminine briefs and facing him boldly without the slightest air of abashment, was the blonde and suddenly more vivacious-appearing, Mary Lazar.

Her stance, with feet planted

wide apart, was statuesque. And, although the unwavering gun seemed to demand attention, Trent let his eyes rove over the girl, working from the slight clefts at her shoulders downward, finally, to the sheer panties which did little to hide the dim, faint rolls of flesh which concealed her sex. She let him do as he pleased, seeming to enjoy his appraisal. Then, at length, apparently tiring of his intense scrutiny, she backed off slowly in the direction of the bed, gun still leveled, and slipped a dressing gown about her shoulders. Trent emitted a deep sigh and dropped into a nearby chair.

"This is the d amnd est case!" he muttered, more to himself than to Mary Lazur. Then, lifting his eyes until they met hers, he asked, "Now what's this about James Wallig being shot?"

SHE DIDN'T answer, at first. Instead, she studied him as though trying to come to some decision. It was her next move that set Trent back on his heels. Without warning she let out a small cry, threw

the gun against the wall and collapsed tearfully upon the bed. Deep sobbing shook her body and Trent, moved by her display of grief, arose to comfort her. But before he could reach the bed she turned savagely toward him and screamed, "What do you want from us? Why can't you leave us alone?"

Now it was Trent's turn to pause in reply. Where did she fit in, he wondered. And did the "us" mean she and Bill Zorn? He found it difficult to figure that way. While he was mulling this over, Mary Lazur seemed to get a new hold on herself. She sat sharply up on the edge of the bed, a movement which made her robe fall from her shoulders. There was a serious expression on her face.

"I won't be occupying this room after today. What will you take to go away? To leave and never come back?" She paused only a moment before continuing. "I don't have much money...but I do have something else—*something* I think you would like." As she said this, she arose slowly from the

bed, her body exacting a lengthy caress along Trent's frame, from his knees, finally up to his chest, as she regained a standing posture. Her lips were wet and there was a far-away look in her eyes.

"It will not be for *love*, Mr. Trent," she stated softly. "But it will be nice—I can promise you that much... Only you must go. You must leave Rayburn. It will save so much trouble."

SHE REACHED for Trent's lips. Her mouth was warm and soft against his. Her arms, encircling his waist, drew him slowly down upon the bed. Minutes lagged like hours as the kiss continued. The room became very still in this lull except for Trent's heavy breathing.

"Is it a *trade*, Mr. Trent?" Mary Lazur whispered to him, her mouth still working against his. "Your departure from Rayburn—for *me*?"

Her words seemed to awaken Trent from an induced lethargy. He had enjoyed her caress. She was one "gift-horse"

he'd like to look in the mouth. But business came first, and he had a job to do. With a wavering hand he repelled her advances as one would an over-anxious dog seeking affection. Although he was sure she knew his answer, she remained persistent. And, again he had to repel her as she was becoming more venturesome.

With pulse throbbing hard against his temples, he pushed her away from him and climbed from the bed. Then, with a forced smile upon his lips, he said, teasingly, "When it's for *love*, Mary Lazur, try me again." With this, he kissed her lightly on the forehead and departed from the room.

A new thought was swimming about in Trent's head. Muttering impatiently, he descended the stairs. He wanted to send a telegram but dared not trust the local office.

"Where," he asked the clerk, "can I hire a car?"

"At the garage—a block down the street."

Trent went out, not noticing the clerk, who hastily dialed a telephone number.

## IV'

**A**T THE GARAGE where automobiles were rented they told Trent that Waverly was the next village down the line.

"Seventeen miles. Just follow the highway markers over the ridge," the attendant said. "A twenty-five dollar deposit, please."

Waverly proved a more pleasant and prosperous hamlet than Rayburn. There was less evidence of squalid living and thinking.

Trent went to the railway station and sent a wire to his partner, Jake Kilbourne, which read:

IT'S MURDER. EXHUME BODY AND EXAMINE CRUSHED SKULL FOR BULLET WOUND. TELL CLIENT CASE IS BROKEN. EXPECT SHOWDOWN SOON. STAND BY FOR HURRY CALL.

Sauntering along the village street Trent entered a hardware store and accosted a smiling clerk.

"I want to buy a gun. Any

rules in the book about it? I'm a stranger here."

"Just one rule." The clerk grinned. "You've got to pay for it. Otherwise..." He shrugged. "What kind? The boys in these parts favor a .45, the automatic model."

From an assortment that seemed large enough to arm a regiment, Trent chose a .38 Special, a gun to which he was accustomed. Buying a box of cartridges he loaded the weapon and slid it into his empty shoulder holster. The clerk's laughing jest was friendly.

"It's only a popgun, Mister. I hope you won't depend on it."

"All a matter of how you use it," Trent retorted. "I suppose that kills a pair of fifties?" He passed over the bills, got a dollar and a half change and ambled out.

**E**VENING was not far off. He drove through the golden radiance of a declining sun. The mountain tops shimmered and misty vales lay deeply shadowed. The light convertible was nearly new and it clipped off an easy pace as Trent started up the western

slope of the ridge above Rayburn. Halfway to the top he glimpsed a powerful sedan parked in a brushy lane. It roared out in pursuit, with three male occupants, and he was amazed at its speed of pickup. Pressing the accelerator to the floor he coaxed the convertible into the seventies despite an increasing grade, but it wasn't enough.

"They could catch me in second gear with that rig," Trent muttered, loosening the new gun in its holster.

The car hung on his tail for a half a mile, although he knew they could have come up with him. Then, he saw the reason. A short way ahead the highway curved along the rim of a steep cliff. There was a hundred-foot drop. Without warning the pursuing auto leaped ahead, racing up along side of him, fender to fender. Two of the occupants were grinning. Trent saw the driver's right hand slide higher on the wheel...

Abruptly, knowing what was coming, Trent slammed on the brake. The light convertible seemed to halt in mid-air.

Then, cramping savagely on the wheel, he tramped on the accelerator and smashed into the sedan's left rear fender. The car dove over the embankment. Trent caught a fleeting glimpse of the hurtling machine and falling bodies, and heard terrified screams before the final far-away crash reached his ears.

"Now if I were a good Samaritan..." he muttered.

**H**IS TEETH clicked grimly, chopping off the irony. The convertible's grill and radiator was knocked askew. In a matter of moments the motor would overheat. But he made the top of the ridge and coasted down to the village with the ignition off.

Rolling to a stop before the garage, he said to the lounging attendant, "Accident back there a ways. Big sedan went off the cliff. Got so interested watching that I bumped into a boulder. Let me know, at the hotel, how much the repairs will cost. You've got twenty-five against it."

The attendant jumped to his feet, gasping, "A big sedan? Dark gray?"

Trent nodded.

"That would have been..."

He hesitated and began to stutter. "H-how about t-them? Were they hurt?"

"Not much. They're dead. Nobody could survive a fall like that. You'd better send an ambulance."

Trent walked away. From his room at the hotel he called a number on the telephone. Zorn's voice, easily recognizable, answered.

"That you, Harry?" the mine boss asked. "How'd you make out?"

"It's Trent. I just wondered if you were in the car."

"What car?" Trent could hear Zorn's rasping intake of breath. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"The one you sent to crowd me off the ridge. Listen, Zorn. If you want to play rough, I'll play rough with you. But it would be a hell of a lot easier all around if you'd just hand over that formula."

Zorn hung up, muttering to himself.

**TRENT FRETTED gloomily:** *He doesn't crack. I don't like this. But—I'd hate*

*like the devil to yell for Jake Kilbourne."*

He remembered a thought which had entered his mind in the morning. James Wallig's hotel room. Could the man have hidden the formula there? Before going down to dinner Trent all but took the place apart, ransacking drawers and closet, closely inspecting the bed, examining rugs, floor and wallpaper. He found no trace of the thing he sought.

Following another notion he thumbed through the thin telephone directory, found a name—Anton Lazur—and dialed the number. A man's voice answered. Trent queried, "Is Mary there? I want to talk with her."

"Just a moment, I'll call her."

A girl came to the 'phone.

"Yes? Who is it?"

"Herb Trent. I must have another talk with you, somewhere. Will you...?"

"You've got the wrong number!"

She hung up. Trent grimaced wryly.

"It's crazy," he mumbled. "Something stinks and I don't know what..." He thought

about Mary Lazur, of his interlude with her in the hotel room. The abrupt way she had disposed of him on the telephone rankled him. He found himself wondering if the trade she had proposed might not have been worth it. He was sure he would never do better. He went down to dinner, grumbling to himself.

IT WAS late. The dining room was nearly empty. Trent ate a hasty meal, keeping a watchful eye upon the doorway and windows, wondering if Zorn would resort to direct attack. Nothing onward happened. Trent wished Mary Lazur would appear but she did not. He went out into the street. Common sense told him that the wiser course would be to stay under cover until Zorn had further shown his hand. But the same irritability that had possessed him since embarking upon the case, moved him, now, to invite trouble.

Down the street near the railroad station a poolroom did a thriving business. Herb Trent walked into the place. Several rear tables were engaged but

the one nearest the door was idle. He strolled back to watch the players.

Someone touched his sleeve. A leering hillbilly in a cheap blue suit adorned with too many buttons, challenged, "I'll play you a game of straight pool for five bucks and spot you ten in a string of fifty."

Trent said, "I'll take a dollar's worth."

Trent won the break, called the corner ball bank and missed. With assurance and speed his opponent ran the table clean, racked them up and kept them dropping. Trent laid a dollar bill upon the table and hung up his cue; commenting, "You're quite a shark."

"That's my name. Shark Givens. And that's how much chance," the man whispered while making a difficult three-cushion shot, "you'll have of getting out of this burg alive. Unless you'd like to spend some dough."

A NUMBER of loafers were watching them closely but none came near. Trent pointed out a combination for Givens to make, commenting, "I

might come up with a little. Where can we talk?"

"It won't be a little." The words slid out the side of Givens mouth with scarcely any movement of the lips. "I'll spiel for a hundred."

"Fifty. Where do we go?"

"You go. I'll follow. East to the end of the street. Last house on the left. It'll be dark. Wait on the front porch."

"You'll meet me?"

Givens nodded.

"You and who else?"

"Nobody else."

"It's a frame."

"Yeah, you're taking a chance. But I'm level."

"You'd better be..."

"Get going—before somebody in here decides to get brave."

Herb Trent knew that the man was too calm, too sure. But, stubbornly, he headed toward the rendezvous.

## V

THE NIGHT was black, the tree-bordered village street poorly lighted. Herb Trent reconnoitered warily, going only part way to

the house Shark Givens had indicated, watching to see if anyone followed. Then he crossed to the opposite side of the thoroughfare and halted in a patch of shadow. The houses on both flanks were dark. An ominous silence hung over that end of town as though the inhabitants had been forewarned of impending trouble. Givens did not put in an appearance. Of course, Trent thought, he might approach through some alley in the rear of the houses. He swore softly.

"It's a frame, but I've got to play out the hand."

He catfooted across the street and moved from tree to tree, pausing to listen beside each trunk until he was directly in front of the last house at the edge of town. It sat back from the sidewalk perhaps forty feet. He could barely discern the outline of a narrow porch across its front. Wait there? Trent shrugged, snorting inwardly. For a bullet in the guts—the silent thrust of a blade in the dark? He hugged the tree trunk more closely, right hand upon his gun.

Somewhere, back along the

street toward town, a shuffling of footsteps sounded—the tread of several men walking hurriedly—but the noise died before it came near. Trent wondered if a group of thugs had detoured between the dwellings, perhaps to encircle him. He shifted his position toward the right so as to get a better view of the porch should he have to sweep its length with gunfire. By stooping low he might be able to silhouette, against the faintly-luminous sky, any figures sneaking from behind to rush him.

ONCE AGAIN he heard the soft thud of footsteps. Near. In the direction he'd anticipated. Nerves tense, gun leveled, he stood beside the tree trunk and stared until his eyes ached, trying to pierce the pall of darkness. Off to his left, toward town, he heard other sounds as of men stealthily moving from shadow to shadow. Every instinct hammering that all hell was about to break loose, Trent debated which route for retreat might prove least dangerous. If they surrounded him entirely, Zorn's killers would be eating

crossfire. There was a possibility that the road leading out of town might be open. But more than likely they would have planned an ambush along its way. He gritted his teeth, deciding that he would try to blast his way straight through the first assault regardless of the direction from which it came.

Beside the house, men moved less guardedly. Trent crouched upon his toes like a sprinter, ready. At the corner a dark blotch of shadow moved. He heard a gurgling sigh as a man lunged toward him. Carefully, precisely, Trent drove a slug through the hurtling body and leaped to meet it; dead flesh might shield him from the expected fusilade. He caught the falling body. No shots broke the silence. Trent eased his burden to the ground. His hand struck the hilt of a knife protruding from the fellow's back.

THE FRAME! This was it. More clever than Trent had expected. Kneeling beside the corpse his muscles tensed for flight, a hoarse command halted him.

"Now!"

Blinding lights flare from all four sides, centering upon Herb Trent.

"Don't move a finger!" the authoritative voice rasped. "Caught you in the act. Murderer! Drop that gun."

Light glinted on rifle and pistol barrels. Trent dropped his revolver. The circle of men closed in. A scrawny, grey-haired individual with a billy-goat's wisp of a beard wore a sheriff's star. Leaning forward he stared at the knife in the dead man's back, rolled the body over and saw bloodstains from a bullet hole in the breast. Swearing shrilly, he accused, "Damned killer! You're more vicious than Zorn said. Shot him down, then stabbed him to make sure. You'll get yours for that!"

Trent stood up slowly, hands raised in response to sharp imprecations from the crowd. He said, "I shot him—but someone stabbed him first. They shoved him out toward me knowing I'd shoot."

Shouts of derision echoed harshly. The sheriff sneered. "A likely story. You'll be lucky

if folks don't organize a lynchin' party when they hear how you butchered poor Shark Givens who never done nobody no harm." He turned to face the dimly-seen members of his band. "You boys gotta be reasonable, now. You gotta help me keep law and order, and see justice done. We'll take him to jail."

THE OFFICER'S voice was a nasal whine. Trent spotted him for a weak-willed hireling and comprehended the laughing jeers of the mob.

"Sure, we'll help you, Taney. Take him right to jail. Lock him up accordin' to Hoyle. If something happens afterward, you can't help it."

A burly miner looped a rope around Trent's neck and jerked it agonizingly tight. Trent thrust one hand beneath the throttling line and freed it a little, marching toward town at the fellow's sharp command.

The street was clear of people. Only when they reached the small, one-story jail two blocks distant from the hotel did Trent see a solitary watching figure. It was Mary Lazur. In the light of a window near

which she stood he observed that her face was drawn and colorless. He again wondered what part the girl played in the violent life of that hell-ritten town, why she was there, what—if anything—she might do.

Bill Zorn was not among the ranks of Trent's captors. He would keep out of the mess, of course, merely arranging it with a clear purpose in mind. That purpose became utterly obvious when Sheriff Taney thrust Trent into a cell, locked the barred door and hung the key upon a nail across the corridor.

"He'll be safe here till morning," the officer whined, "if you boys don't say nothin' downtown to stir things up. Then, soon as we can get the Judge on the job, we'll dish out quick justice and have no trouble about it."

"Oh, he'll be safe!" gibed the tough who had roped Trent's neck. "An' we won't say a word, will we boys? Not a whisper. But, I'll just leave this length of hemp hangin' right beside your key, Sheriff. In case anybody should want it..."

HIS EVIL laughter told the whole tale of horror and hanging to come. Trent tried a bluff.

"Sheriff! I have good friends at the capitol, in Nashville. They know I'm here. If anything happens to me, it'll be all up with you in spite of anything Bill Zorn can do. You'd better stick around to see that nothing goes haywire."

"There ain't no damned killer can talk to me like that," the sheriff blustered. "Nothin's gonna happen. You'll be tried tomorrow. An' all your friends in Nashville won't get you out of killin' Shark Givens."

"That's tellin' him, Sheriff!" someone applauded. "We'll back you up. We saw what he done."

The big tough who had brought the rope, said, "You get along home, Sheriff. You need some sleep. We'll keep an eye on this rat's nest tonight."

"Mebbe I'd better, boys," the officer mumbled. "Got a big day ahead tomorrow. But you all come a ways with me."

He shambled out, after extinguishing the light, followed

by the noisy gang. Herb Trent swore impotently. He had counted on a fight and had been willing to risk uneven odds, but here he was penned like an animal awaiting slaughter. He railed at his own lack of wit for not having wired Jake Kilbourne to come; his damned foolishness in attempting a lone play when every tough in that hard-boiled mining town was at Bill Zorn's beck and call. Disliking the case from the start, nursing a grouch since the moment he set foot in Rayburn, he had let temper run away with judgement and now was on the spot.

IT WAS BLACK in the cell that he occupied. Fumbling for matches, finding that he had none, he groped about the cell for anything that might serve as a tool or weapon.

"I've got maybe fifteen minutes to get out of this jam," he muttered, "and nothing to do it with. If luck doesn't pinch-hit for brains tonight, old man Trent's boy has had it."

There was no window in the cell, so far as Trent could determine. The barred door was heavy and securely fastened.

He soon admitted to himself that he was hopelessly trapped. The planned result of Zorn's scheming would be blightingly effective.

In a section where lynchings were common another would cause little comment. Headlines, perhaps, in the village weekly. One-inch items in city dailies. Jake Kilbourne would visit Rayburn on an errand of retribution, but might even suffer the same fate if unwarned. Trent wondered a little about the murder of Shark Givens. Unquestionably the fellow had considered himself a party to the frame-up. For, if actually he was bent on betraying Zorn, certainly he would have approached Trent less obviously. It seemed evident, too, that Givens, in some way, had crossed the mine boss and proved a convenient sacrifice when a victim was needed. Zorn had killed two birds with one stone.

TRENT HEARD the outer door open and close softly. A patter of light footsteps in the corridor was followed by a girl's muted whisper, "Where are you?"

Mary Lazur! He knew the voice.

"Over here. This way..."

"They're coming," she gasped, "to hang you. Oh, why didn't you get out of town as I begged you to do? All this trouble is of your making."

"That may be," Trent answered soberly. "But I came with a job to do and I couldn't funk it. I wanted that stolen formula."

"Oh, you're a liar," Mary Lazur sobbed, "or just a fool. There never has been a formula. Or, if there was, Bill Zorn didn't steal it." Anger sharpened her tone. "You know that isn't why you came! And you're after the wrong man..."

She hushed, listening. Trent heard the yells of men afar off, and guessed that the mob had gathered near the railway station. Mary Lazur moaned, "They're starting! They'll hang you, and I'd hoped there'd be an end to killings. Oh, I don't know what to do..."

"Well, I do!" Trent rasped. "The key to this cell. It's hanging on the wall behind

you. Let me out! Unless you'd like to watch me kicking at a rope's end..."

"Will you promise to leave town? Tonight? And never come back?"

"I can't do that." A streak of stubbornness in Trent's nature made it impossible for him to take the easy way. "I came for the formula and I still intend to get it. Of course, you can crawl out of here and let them hang me. But, you know I didn't kill Shark Givens."

The shouting men drew near. Mary Lazur cried in growing frenzy: "I don't want any more murders! I've got to let you go..." The key clicked in the lock. Trent heard her hoarse warning. "Stay away from Bill Zorn." Her voice shook with passion. "If you try to harm him, I'll shoot you, myself!"

## VI

**B**RENT JERKED open the cell door and leaped into the corridor after her, exclaiming: "Wait! I've got to talk to..."

But the girl was gone. Drunken cries of the would-be lynchers sounded only a block away. Trent judged there might be two dozen men in the mob—a hand-picked crew—but the other villagers were wisely keeping under cover. He darted outside the small building and circled around to the back, cutting across lots to place a distance between himself and the gang. Stumbling over fences, barked at by dogs, he hit the village street a short distance beyond the hotel and paused to reconnoiter. Only one person moved within range of his vision—a girl who passed beneath a light farther down—and Trent guessed that it was Mary Lazur.

He followed, maintaining the space between them, keeping in shadow as much as possible. He suspected that her destination was the house of Bill Zorn. She turned off the street. Trent moved more cautiously. He recognized Zorn's place. The windows were dark but he caught a brief flash of light from within when she opened and closed the door.

Trent crept close to the

dwelling, hoping that Zorn kept no dog. He went from window to window searching for a crack. A thin wedge of light slanted beneath one blind. Peering through the slit he saw Zorn facing the girl. Mary Lazur was weeping soulfully. Trent could not clearly distinguish her words but he growled angrily when Zorn swung his open palm in a brutal slap that sent her reeling against the wall.

**G**OING BACK to the house front, Trent tried the door. It was unlocked. He stepped inside. A dim lamp only partially illuminated the dark depths of a long hallway.

He heard Bill Zorn's voice in a room beyond and went to listen. The mining boss snarled, "Stop your bawling! I'll give you worse than that the next time you upset any of my plans. By turning that dick loose you've let me wide open for trouble."

"He won't come back," Mary sobbed. "And you promised me there'd be nothing more like that. Wasn't one enough? Don't you see where

this sort of thing will lead?"

"One was enough," Zorn raged, "to bring me plenty of dough each month so long as things worked the way I wanted them to. But..." He swore viciously. "With that flatfoot snooping around down here, trying to upset everything, what do you expect me to do? Let him get away with it? After I've been warned?"

"I won't have you killing him!" Mary Lazur's face hardened and she demanded: "Where would I be if you were caught for murder? What good would you be to me in prison?"

"You've been overworking that 'possessive' bit," Zorn sneered. "You take too much for granted. Sure! you've been nice—but I've spent plenty of money on you to earn it. And..." Anger thickened the words in his throat. "If ever you butt into serious business like this again, I'll kill you just as easily as I'm going to kill that detective."

ZORN, IN his pacing about the room, had paused near the door. Trent flung it open

and drove a smashing right to the man's jaw that knocked him to his knees. Leaping forward, hoping to find a gun on him, he tripped over a rug and sprawled across Zorn's legs. The fall saved him. Zorn was down but far from out. He had dragged a revolver from his coat pocket and let drive from a crouch. Trent locked a steel grip upon his wrist and began driving short, hard punches to the man's chin.

Mary Lazur's small scream was sharp as a tiger's. Snatching a glass vase from the mantel she smashed it across Trent's skull. He grunted, shaking his head blindly.

"Don't! Are you crazy? He'll kill both..."

Mary Lazur hit him again. The revolver flew out of Zorn's grasp as they struggled. Trent, half dazed, loosened his hold and dove for it. Mary Lazur kicked it across the room and ran to snatch it up. Holding the weapon with both hands, blue eyes blazing, she cried, "I told you I'd shoot you, myself, if you tried to harm him. You had your chance..."

"He'll not get another," Zorn said, rising to his feet, fingering his bruised jaw. "Keep that gun on him while I tie him up." He jerked curtain cords from a window drape and motioned for Mary to stand behind Trent where there was little chance of his making a play for the weapon. Moments later, Zorn had his captive securely bound and lying on the floor.

**I**OUGHT to blast him here and now. But I'll play it differently because you pitched in and helped." He was frowning at the girl. "We'll keep him here till morning, then let Judge Benton try him. He can't get out of a murder rap for killing Shark Givens, and nobody'll believe any ranting he does about Wallig."

Mary Lazur's pale face was drawn in bitter lines. "I suppose it's the only way..."

Zorn rasped, "I can use a drink. Find a bottle."

He followed her out. Trent heard them talking in a room down the hall. Zorn complained, "I'll never know what

started him on the trail of old Wallig's killing—but, to hell with it. Now it's over."

A few moments later, when footsteps clattered on the wooden porch and men's excited voices brought news of the prisoner's escape from jail, Zorn stalled them curtly saying he had captured the man and would hold him until a trial could be set the next day. Leaving, they grumbled over their spoiled sport in a manner that made Trent shudder.

**W**RITHING and straining to stretch the soft cords that bound him Herb Trent saw beside his face several papers that had slipped from Zorn's pocket when they had wrestled upon the floor. With a sidewise motion of his head he flattened a telegram that lay half-unfolded. He saw his own name typed there and loosed a wrathful exhalation when he read the context of the message. Zorn, returning, seeing what he was about, gave him a heavy kick in the ribs that brought on a wave of nausea.

Stooping to recover the fall-

en papers the mine boss muttered, "It's a lucky thing that I got a line on you in time."

"You didn't," Trent jeered. "I sent a telegram, too. From Waverly. There's one man in this country who'll blast your guts out if he doesn't find me alive and kicking. Take these ropes off and maybe we can settle this another way..."

Zorn sat down in a chair fondling a bottle of liquor. Raising it to his lips he gulped half its contents with one swallow, then turned a red-eyed glare upon his prisoner.

"Nobody's gonna blast me. I run this town. Every stranger who shows his face, hereafter, gets the bum's rush. I was too damned polite with you..."

Mary Lazur perched on the arm of Zorn's chair and whispered something into his ear. He swept her aside angrily.

"Why shouldn't I drink! I can use it." Then, turning back to Trent, he said, "There's trouble coming out of all of this, but there won't none of it be trouble for me." His noisy drinking nearly emptied the bottle. The shock of raw liquor seemed to numb his

senses. With Trent's narrowed gaze upon him, Zorn soon dozed.

"Mary!" Trent's voice was a whisper. "You can pick a better man for yourself than this killer. His number is up. Forget him. Think of yourself. Untie these ropes—I'll see that you're looked after, later."

"You would think I'd do that." There was scorn in her bitter smile. "You believe I'd let him down—because of that day in the hotel room? Well—I'm not that kind. I might have given you everything that day. Every little bit of me—but it would have been a *sacrifice*—for him." She nodded toward Bill Zorn. Her face softened a little. "He was good to me, before things...happened. And, he's all I've got." She nodded, speaking as though to herself. "He's still my man."

## VII

THE NIGHT hours dragged. Zorn slept in his chair, head drooping awry, mouth gaping. Mary Lazur, pale and nervous, refused to talk further with

Trent. But she stayed awake and cast occasional sharp looks in his direction. The cords upon his wrists and ankles had eased a little so that they no longer impeded circulation, but he could not work them loose; the miner knew how to tie knots.

Trent's rage mounted hour by hour as he considered the chain of events that had brought him to his present pass. He thought there was a slim chance that the telegram he had sent to Jake Kilbourne—maliciously worded so as to cause his disliked client some suspense—might result in visitors before morning.

Confirming this guess came the drone of airplane motors overhead along toward day-break. The ship circled the village several times, evidently wanting to land. Herb Trent wondered if the little-used air field were lighted, if the plane could get down. When the sounds faded away he gave up hope. Perhaps Zorn had foreseen some such contingency and was prepared for it. Mary Lazur gave no sign of interest, nor would she answer his ques-

tions. Half an hour later, Zorn woke up and stretched himself. Raising a window blind he looked forth into the greying dawn.

"Mary!" he growled. "Get on the 'phone and tell that old fool, Sheriff Taney, to come put this bird back in jail." Stooping, he cut the cords on Trent's ankles, advising: "Limb-ber up your legs. He'll walk you over there. And, no tricks..."

THE GIRL had just finished calling when a doorbell rang. She uttered a sharp exclamation and Zorn went to stare down the outer hallway.

"Who's there?" he queried.

"Strangers," she whispered. "But, one of them looks like..."

Zorn drew his gun, held it beneath his coat and snapped, "That's young Wallig. Let 'em in! Something's gone wrong."

Herb Trent's heart leaped at the sound of Jake Kilbourne's voice demanding, "Come on—open up! Where's my partner? If anything's happened..."

Trent yelled a warning. "Jake! Watch that guy! I'm tied up in here..."

Trent tried to get through the doorway but bumped into Bill Zorn returning. The mine boss made the obvious play. Wheeling to face Jake Kilbourne, he rasped, "This your partner?" He shot a glance at Trent. "If he is, he's also a murderer! He killed a man last night. I'm holding him for the Sheriff. And make no mistake—there were plenty of witnesses. But—he'll be legally tried. He's lucky the town's people didn't lynch him last night. You can thank *me* for that."

JAKE KILBOURNE'S rugged face was wrinkled in anger. Disregarding the gun in Zorn's fist he crossed the floor and slashed the cords from Trent's wrists with a pocket knife. Clarence Wallig had followed them into the room and Mary Lazur stood in the doorway, her face a mask of fright.

Trent frowned at Wallig. "How come you're down here. Thought you had a bad heart."

Wallig slid a hand beneath his coat front, clutching his breast. "It hurts like hell—but I had to come. I saw the telegram you sent to Jake Kil-

bourne. I wanted to know if Zorn talked...about the formula."

Zorn eyed his young employer narrowly. "I don't know just what you mean by that crack, but watch your step. I've got everything under control. See?"

"You may think you have," Wallig sneered, "but you don't know, yet, what I might do."

Big, red-faced Jake Kilbourne stared from one to the other of the tense, brittle-voiced pair. Looking toward Herb Trent, he said, "Wise me up. What's the play here? I don't know much more about this than what you sent in the telegram..."

Trent nodded. "That was plenty, wasn't it? The show-down begins now!" He glanced at Zorn. "I telegraphed my partner, saying,

"'James Wallig murdered. Exhume body and examine crushed skull for bullet wound. Tell Clarence Wallig case cracked. Expect show-down soon.'"

AS TRENT reiterated the message the blood slowly drained from Zorn's face.

Mary Lazur crossed the room and stood at the mine boss' side, trying to convey some message of warning to him with her eyes.

Trent continued, "I had a hunch awhile ago, Jake, that my wire might bring you and Wallig hotfooting it down here. In a way, it was a break I didn't deserve. Wallig sent me down to this pest-hole to find a formula which he claimed Bill Zorn had stolen.

"Zorn got wind of it and tried to run me out of town—quietly at first. Then, failing in that and after he'd found out I suspected old Wallig had been murdered, he framed me with the killing of a local pool shark. Last night, after I'd been locked up for this phoney crime, he sent a lynching party out after me. Had it not been for the blessed conscience of Mary Lazur, here, the firm of Trent & Kilbourne would have been minus a partner. It wasn't until late yesterday that the pieces in this affair finally began to fall together . . . when I discovered that Clarence Wallig had hired Zorn to murder his father..."

Trent never finished his say. Wallig jerked out a gun. So did Bill Zorn; but the latter's missed fire. Wallig blasted again and again. Punctuating his accusation with bullets, he screamed: "I knew you'd talk! You damned blackmailer..." Wheeling, he started to sprint across the room.

**TRENT'S** rush caught him halfway to the door.

"You and your faked heart trouble," Trent growled, dragging him back across the room. "Jake! This phoney—not only warned me I might have to kill Zorn to get the formula—but he wired Zorn to get *me!* Told him I was on to their game. Wallig must have figured us to kill each other and leave him in the clear."

Mary Lazur was on her knees sobbing uncontrollably over Zorn's corpse. "I had unloaded his gun," she grieved, "after you were tied." Tearfully, she looked up at Trent. "And just when he needed it..."

Dropping the unconscious Wallig to the floor Trent mur-

mured sympathetic words to her.

Jake Kilbourne touched Trent's shoulder. "I thought there was something amiss when that heart case got out of bed to come down here with me. I looked into the old man's death but they told me his body had been cremated, so we couldn't have hung a thing on them from that end. Still, I did give some credence to the idea that the guy was worried about the formula. What did happen to it, anyway?"

"Formula!" Trent snorted. "You still don't get it. That was a hoax...unless you want to call Wallig's cute plot a 'formula' for a double killing."

THEY LOOKED up startled, when four men rushed into the house from the street. The mangy sheriff waved a large revolver and his deputies carried rifles. Jake Kilbourne lowered his gun at sight of the star and eyed Trent inquiringly.

Trent growled, "I'd forgotten about the *law* in this town. I've something to square." He glared at Taney. "Sheriff! You

listen—and listen real good! Last night you tried to wrap me up for the murder of Shark Givens, knowing full well that Bill Zorn, the dead man here, had him killed before my slug splattered his guts..."

"You killed him, too?" the sheriff sputtered, interrupting Trent, looking over his shoulder, seeing for the first time the two inert bodies. "That makes another murder you've got to answer for! Don't think you're gonna get away with it. I'm arresting you..."

Trent snapped, "I'm going to make a 'phone call. Jake! Blast the first one of these bastards who tries to stop me. And keep an eye on Wallig."

He started toward the hallway, contemptuously sweeping Taney aside. The sheriff cried, "Wait! Hold on, there. Who're you gonna call?"

"The State House. Nashville. To have you ousted from office. There isn't enough sense in that pea-brain of yours to be a boy scout, much less a lawman."

"Now, don't you go off half-cocked, young feller." The sheriff tugged at his beard

nervously. "Who killed who, if you didn't?"

"**I**'VE TOLD you twice, Sheriff. But I'll repeat it. Zorn had Givens killed. You can get proof of that by pressuring some of the boys in that mob last night. That heap over there with the busted jaw is Clarence Wallig, son of the late James Wallig. He hired Zorn to murder his father. Zorn had been blackmailing him. Just before you arrived, Wallig shot him. Here's a witness who knows the whole story...if she'll talk."

He turned to Mary Lazur. Fear dulled her eyes. Trent said to the sheriff, "Understand, she had nothing to do with the killings. Don't try to hang anything on her or I'll have your scalp!"

Mary Lazur looked gratefully up at Trent, saying, "I'll tell him everything. It—doesn't matter now."

The others left the room dragging Wallig along with them. Herb Trent tried to comfort the girl. "You'll need money," he said. "And I'll see that nobody accuses you of any-

thing at the trial. I owe you a lot..."

Face buried in her hands she scarcely heard him. He stood irresolute, touched by her grief, but snapped out of it with a mutter of mild profanity when Jake Kilbourne came back to the door and drawled, "You've been pretty smart, 'Sherlock.' So maybe you can clear up another point. We've spent a lot of dough on this case. Hick cops have pinched our customer and put him behind bars. Who's gonna pay the bill?"

**H**ERB TRENT was searching for an answer to this puzzler when a new thought crept into his mind. About Wallig's bright-eyed house girl. About how lonely she might become now that Wallig was out of the running. About long legs and soft curves. About how...

He turned his crooked grin abruptly toward Jake Kilbourne, saying, "It's a hell of a note, all right, Jake. But, chin up! I've a feeling something *nice* may yet show itself to make up the difference."

wanted  
for  
murder--  
a  
passionate  
lover

*Special Feature*

by PAUL  
BURTON-MERCUR

*The note read, "Don't you know that your sweet smile has me going crazy?" And that was all the police had to work on, when this girl was stabbed in the street.*

THE OVERHANGING elm trees in this pretentious residential section of Montclair, New Jersey, whispered dark forebodings as they blotted out the shimmering halos of sparsely-located street gas lights.

Except for a few passengers discharged by Public Service buses, Bellevue Avenue was gradually becoming deserted at ten o'clock on this Wednesday evening of May 8th, 1935.

Edward L. Stone, a tall, middle-aged, dark-complexioned stock broker, emerged out of dense shadows and slowly walked down to Bellevue Avenue with his brown police dog straining at the leash and sniffing the curb. Suddenly the canine halted his search and pricked up his ears. Wheezing, gurgling sounds, similar to those of one strangling to death, came from the dark recess of Bellevue Avenue. The dog continued barking and pulling his master in the direction from where the eerie, frightful sounds came.

Sensing something definitely wrong, Stone guided the beam of his small pocket flashlight

toward that spot and finally it came to pause upon a prostrate object on the grassy walk: a girl.

"Here, here," he called quickly and bent down over the girl. "What's the matter? What's happened? Are you hurt?" And only then he noticed that she had been stabbed. Blood was gushing out of two deep wounds in her neck. "Who did it, Miss? Who did it?" But the young woman could not answer.

Ordering his police dog to lie down beside the girl, Stone hurried to the residence of the Walter G. Schelker. There he had Mrs. Schelker call the police while he hastened back to the wounded girl with Walter Schelker, a gray-haired, stout man in an attempt to help her.

**C**APTAIN THOMAS CLAREN of the Montclair Police Department arrived with Detectives Ken Cardell, John Mahony and Francis Felty. Too, the police reserve car pulled up to the curb with additional men. Two minutes later, the clang-ing hospital ambulance added its din to the macabre setting

in a town traditionally sylvan in nature.

The girl was rushed to the Mountainside Hospital of Montclair and Captain Claren ordered the streets immediately surrounding Bellevue Avenue blocked off and the ground searched.

Edward Stone told the police that he had noticed a tall thin man quicken his steps toward Bellevue Theater just a few minutes before the police dog led him to discover the girl's body.

"Did you take a good look at him?" asked Captain Claren.

"No," replied Edward Stone. "But I'd judge the man to be about 35 years old, and about 5'9 in height."

An alarm was immediately sent out, asking the police of Newark, the Oranges, Bloom-field, Passaic and Paterson to check all incoming trolleys and to watch bus terminals for a man answering the description given by Stone.

**M**EANWHILE at the Mountainside Hospital the doctors and the nurses worked fe-

verishly to revive the girl, in spite of the hopelessness confronting them. By the two wounds in her neck it was transparent that a stiletto had penetrated clear to the front, making normal breathing extremely difficult.

From papers found in her pocketbook the police learned that her name was Anna Schmid, a housemaid who worked for Mrs. Max Kade, at 2 Edgecliff Road, Montclair, a stone's throw from Bellevue Avenue.

Throughout the night, the Montclair police worked relentlessly to uncover traces of the attacker of the pretty girl, but by morning, regrettably, not a single clue had been turned up.

At this time Patrolman Walter Cummings reported to Capt. Claren that the previous evening, at ten, while he was standing in front of the Bellevue Theater waiting to accompany the theater manager carrying his nightly deposit to the Bank of Montclair and Trust Co. he noticed a thin, tall, hollow-cheeked man walking up and down nervously. The man wore a brown suit and a battered gray felt hat. His height

was, the policeman judged, about five feet, nine inches.

"I alerted myself for any eventuality," said Cummings, "just in case a holdup of the theater manager was in the works."

AT THIS point, a bus stopped at the corner to let out passengers and when it drove off, the thin, tall man was there no more. "I couldn't say whether or not he had boarded the bus. But on reading Edward Stone's description of the assailant in this morning's paper, the picture of that man walking up and down nervously suddenly registered in my mind."

An hour later Edward Stone and Patrolman Cummings' stories gained more credence when John Maddock, the Erie Railroad gateman whose watchman shanty was about thirty feet from the Bellevue Theater, walked into the Montclair Police Headquarters and related that he had noticed a tall, thin, hollow-cheeked man of about thirty-five, wearing a brown suit and standing in front of the theater. Maddock said fur-

ther that after a bus had pulled up from Newark and gone off, this man walked back and forth from the theater to the corner like one anxiously waiting for his sweetheart to hop off the next bus.

"I gave him the eye for a while," said the gateman, "and then paid him no mind. But on reading the description of the suspect in this morning's paper I couldn't help conclude that the man I saw walking back and forth in front of the theater last night could be the girl's attacker."

Captain Claren called up the Mountainside Hospital and was told that the girl was slowly regaining consciousness but would be unable to talk for quite some time. The doctor, however, who had examined her and found she had not been violated, hoped she might be all right for an interview that afternoon.

**M**EANWHILE, Detective George Meagher, from the Essex County Prosecutor's staff, entered the hunt for the attacker. And after listening to the details surrounding the as-

sault, he gave robbery as the motive.

"I don't think so," disagreed slightly gray-haired, distinguished-looking Claren. "If the motive for the attack was robbery, the \$24 we found in her purse would be missing. To me it smacks more like the work of a rejected, jealous suitor." He concluded. "Let's see what Mrs. Kade, the girl's employer, has to say."

"Anna stabbed!" exclaimed Mrs. Kade, shocked when Claren told her about the tragedy. "I can't believe it."

Mrs. Kade, a gentle lady of means, quite popular in Montclair, explained that the Schmid girl, a quiet, sweet-tempered young woman, had been in her employ for two years and was considered dependable and honest and, most certainly, "decent and respectable." Anna received \$55 a month, her room, board and clothes. Even her doctor bills were paid by the Kades, and she had no one to support.

"Did she have a boy friend?"

"To the best of my knowledge, she did not," replied Mrs. Kade. "Recently she mentioned

meeting a man whose uncle was a doctor here in Montclair, but —no, she didn't have a boy friend as far as I know."

However, Mrs. Kade said, many men were attracted to Anna because of her sweet smile.

**I**N ANNA'S room Claren found two notes. One was from a George Schmid in Philadelphia. He wrote that he was coming to see her "unless I am scheduled to work."

The other missive, apparently hastily scrawled, read:

"My darling Anna:  
Why do you refuse to  
speak to me or see me?  
Don't you know that  
your quiet, sweet smile  
has me going crazy? I  
must talk to you. Please  
meet me in front of the  
Bellevue Theatre to-  
morrow afternoon at 5."

This note was unsigned.

A further search of Anna's room uncovered a Postal Savings Bank book showing a balance of \$150. In view of the liberality of her employer the police were not surprised Anna had been able to save. What

did surprise them was that, in less than one year, the little housemaid had withdrawn large sums in amounts of \$150 to \$350 from an original \$1,050.

"Why did she make such heavy withdrawals when she had no one to support and no living expenses to meet?" Captain Claren asked himself. "Could it be that she was supplying sums of money to someone? Who was this man who had a doctor-uncle in Montclair? Was she being blackmailed? And, if so, for what?" This was something for the police to go by.

**A**S CAPTAIN CLAREN prepared to leave Mrs. Kade's house, a call came to him to rush to Mountainside Hospital. Doctors were about to try to insert a tube into Anna's throat so that she could breathe normally. If the effort was successful, the girl might be able to talk.

However when he arrived at the hospital he found the victim in such a weak condition from loss of blood that she was unable to say a single word beyond a few inaudible whispers. Claren encouraged her to talk,

but suddenly she lapsed into a coma and Dr. Kern advised the police against pressing the questioning.

Claren was barely in the corridor when Miss Carney, the attending nurse, rushed out of Anna Schmid's room after him to say that the girl had died without returning to consciousness.

Immediately another teletype message was flashed: "Wanted — on — suspicion — of murder."

Captain Claren assigned two detectives to check the drivers of all buses which had arrived or departed from Montclair between 9 and 11 p.m., hoping to learn if any driver had carried the tall, thin man as a passenger.

Meanwhile, two detectives who had been assigned to cover the area in which the murder had occurred, and to follow the probable route of flight taken by the suspect along Bellevue Avenue, returned with a clue—a blood-stained handkerchief found near the Erie Railroad tracks. This handkerchief was sent to Dr. Albert Edel, Essex County chemist, to determine

if the stains were those of human blood.

"We certainly don't have much," said Captain Claren. "That is, we don't have yet. Let's see, what did Mrs. Kade say?" He checked his notebook. "Before Anna went to Mrs. Kade she worked for Mrs. Raymond Kierstead of Valley Road, Montclair. And before that for a George Louvis in a candy store in Upper Montclair. Well, let's take a run out and see them."

MRS. KIERSTEAD corroborated Mrs. Kade's story: Anna was a sweet girl with a "charming smile" which attracted men, but she was not the type of a young woman who would have flirted herself into danger.

George Louvis also had pleasant things to say about the Schmid girl who had worked in his candy store for three years. A model of a girl. Invariably she visited her uncle, Mathias Fetzer, weekends.

"Where does her uncle live?" asked the captain.

"In Newark." He furnished Claren with Fetzer's address.

As Mathias Fetzer had not

read the daily papers, he was, naturally, shocked to hear what had happened to his lovely niece. She had visited him the previous afternoon. They had had dinner. He, himself, had seen her off on the Montclair bus No. 60 at about 9:35.

Claren asked if Anna had a boy friend.

"Yes," replied the grief-stricken, short, gray-haired uncle. "George Schmid of Philadelphia." He hastened to explain that the similarity of names was purely a coincidence.

The captain immediately sent a telegram to the Philadelphia police asking for information regarding George Schmid and to check on his movements the night of the murder.

**WHILE WAITING** for the answer, Claren picked up a call from Detective Felty, who had been assigned to check with Public Service buses operating in that area, to the effect that H.S. Harrison, a driver of Public Service Bus No. 60, told him that on the night of the crime he arrived at Lorraine Avenue and Valley

Road, Montclair, at about 10:15; a man of about thirty-five, thin, tall and hollow-cheeked, boarded his bus hurriedly, like one rushing to get away. He wore a brown suit, weighed about 140 pounds, and stood about 5 feet 9. Before he got off at the Public Service bus terminal he inquired about bus service to Philadelphia.

"I think we have the murderer of Anna Schmid," said Claren. But his wave of optimism melted the next morning when the murdered girl's uncle, Fetzer, called to report that George Schmid had read in the papers about Anna's brutal attack and murder, and was coming to attend her funeral.

This puzzled Claren no end. If George Schmid of Philadelphia had murdered the girl, would he want to expose himself to the police? On the other hand, it could be interpreted as a bold attempt to throw the police off his track.

Late that evening, Claren and Meagher went to Kunz' Morgue in Orange, N. J., where Dr. Harrison H. Martland, Chief Medical Examiner of Essex County, had performed

an autopsy on the body of the slain girl. He revealed that death came to her as a result of stab wounds in the back of her neck. A stiletto or a long-bladed knife had passed through the axis vertebra and punctured the esophagus and windpipe by the violence of the blow. He found two pieces of steel in the spinal column of the victim.

"In my opinion," said Dr. Martland, "the weapon was an old style, double-edged stiletto with a blade at least six inches long."

**T**HE FOLLOWING morning, Captain Claren posted detectives in the funeral parlor where friends and relatives of the murdered housemaid had gathered to pay their last respect. George Schmid from Philadelphia, pointed out by Uncle Fetzer, attended it as he had said he would.

The moment the ceremony was over, they picked him up and brought him to Headquarters for questioning.

"I met Anna last August," he said candidly, "on the boat returning from Europe. We got to like each other. I came to

see her practically every other Sunday. We'd go to the movies in Newark, have dinner and then go window-shopping as we had planned to get married next fall. Afterward I'd put her on a Montclair bus and I'd return to Philadelphia."

Patrolman Cummings was brought face-to-face with Schmid. "No," he said, after a long scrutiny of the suspect, "that's not the man I saw."

Next, Schmid was faced by Maddock. Finally the railroad gateman also shook his head and said, "That is not the man I saw watching the buses."

Then came a telegram from Philadelphia confirming Schmid's statement that he was in Philly at work on the night of Anna's murder.

Claren's high hope of early solution of his murder mystery fell when Dr. Edel's report on the blood-stained handkerchief picked up near the Erie Railroad tracks revealed that the stains were red dye instead of human blood.

**C**APTAIN CLAREN and his group of investigators began their investigation afresh, re-

turning to re-examine the entire vicinity of the crime. The killer couldn't've been that clever as to have perpetrated the perfect crime.

They searched each street minutely, until they came to a pretentious house on Upper Montclair Avenue. A girl, in a maid's uniform, came bounding across the velvety lawn to them from the house. She was Catherine Nicol, she said. She thought she had information of importance to solve the Schmid murder. On the night of the crime, she had stepped off a bus at Bellevue Avenue. It was—she wasn't too certain as to the time—about 10:15 by the bank clock. When she was crossing the Erie Railroad tracks, she met a man she knew—Arthur Lanson. She talked to him for a few minutes.

After they said "good-night" to each other, she started to walk toward Upper Montclair Avenue. But before she turned into the street, she glanced over her shoulder casually and noticed that Lanson was making a hasty dash across Bellevue Avenue. "I thought maybe if I told you about him being near Bellevue Avenue at that time

he could help you. He lives on Broad Street, in Newark."

"What's he look like, Miss Nicol?" asked Claren.

"Oh, sort of tall and thinish-like," she said.

THE OFFICERS could hardly wait to get to Newark. Lanson was easily found and no more nervous than Schmid under police questioning.

"Mr. Lanson—where were you the night of May 8th?" asked Claren. "Would you mind giving us an account of all your movements from 9:30 to 11 o'clock?"

Lanson revealed that on the night the Schmid girl was murdered, he had visited a girl friend who worked in the same home where Miss Nicol was employed. After he said "good-night" to Miss Nicol, he went into a diner for a cup of coffee. Later he waited for a bus at Lorraine Avenue. Riding to Newark he asked the operator about transportation to Philadelphia because he expected to go there on business soon. Then he went home.

This, Claren deducted, was the man whom driver Harrison

had described entering his bus the night of the murder.

After a severe grilling and cross-examination and a thorough check on his movements the night of the crime, Claren realized that the solution to this baffling murder mystery was nowhere near solved now than it was the night of the murder.

Then, recalling what Mrs. Kade had said, he asked Lanson whether he had an uncle practicing medicine in Montclair or, for that matter, anywhere else.

"No, sir," said Lanson. "I certainly haven't," he said emphatically.

Claren now centered his attention on questioning all Montclair doctors in another attempt to locate the "nephew" Anna had met, for he was convinced now that this "nephew" could turn out to be the man who had written the love note, the man who had killed her when his passionate advances had been repulsed. However, after three days of tireless, assiduous canvassing of the town's physicians, no "nephew" had been flushed out to solve

this forever-deepening murder mystery that so far had defied all their combined efforts.

**T**H E FOLLOWING ten days were spent taking Patrolman Cummings and Erie Railroad gateman Maddock from one rogues' gallery to another of northern New Jersey in the belief that they might identify the thin, tall, hollow-cheeked man who wore a brown suit in vain.

Despair and anger reached the boiling stage in the Montclair Police Headquarters. At about this time, Captain Claren picked up a telephone call from the Newark Police Department advising him that Detective John Capodanno had arrested a Hugo Buttner who had escaped from the Morris Plains, N. J. State hospital for the insane. The arrest had taken place on May 6th, two days before the murder of the lovely housemaid. His description fitted that of the Schmid suspect.

Claren drove to the Newark Police Headquarters. He questioned Buttner and checked on his movements the night of the crime. He brought Cummings

and Maddock down to identify him. But at the end of the day it was definitely established that Buttner was not the killer of the housemaid.

**S**EVENTEEN days had passed since the murder, when Captain Claren, watching the teletype like a hawk, picked up a message from the Newark Police Department. It read,

"Wanted for robbery, larceny of auto, and false pretense, Joseph Kenna, alias J. C. Kelly, 5'9, 130 lbs. Wearing brown suit, brown hat, brown shoes. Red Cross nurse tattooed on his arms. This man is armed with a revolver and has been an inmate of the State Insane Asylum and is dangerous. Use caution in apprehending him. This man often pretends that he has been hit by an automobile on the street and will fall and lie in the street and when he is removed to a hospital he represents himself as a Department of Justice agent and generally engages a room and a few nurses for himself. After a few hours he gets dressed

and leaves the hospital. Police departments are requested to notify all hospitals to be on the lookout for such a man, arrest and hold him for this department as we hold a warrant for this man's arrest. This subject may easily be identified by the aforesaid tattoo marks. Any information notify the Newark, N. J. police."

Claren studied the teletype message analytically. The more he read it the more he became convinced that Joseph Kenna might be the answer to the seventeen-day-old murder enigma that had been knocking the pins from under the proud history of the Montclair Police Department. He obtained a police flyer from the Newark Police Department and had Cummings and Maddock look at it. Each decided the picture might be that of the man who had stood in front of the Bellevue Theater. "Could be," they said. "And then maybe not."

**T**HIS FOLLOWING morning, Detective Meagher hurried to the Montclair Police Headquarters with the belated report that the Newark Police

Department had received the following teletype from the Philadelphia police. It read,

"Be advised that Joseph F. Kenna, alias J. C. Kelly, is under arrest by our 12th Police District, having been picked up on the highway and claiming he was struck by an auto, but there are no signs of injury."

The next morning Joseph Kenna was extradited to Newark to answer charges against him. Captain Claren informed the Newark police that he wished to question the suspect about the murder of the Montclair housemaid.

Kenna was questioned at length by the captain and by Meagher. The suspect firmly stated that on the night of May 8th he had been at a party given in honor of a cousin at his uncle's home in Montclair.

Claren and Meagher looked at each other and sighed with relief. After weeks of thankless work, they were about to break the case wide open—they hoped.

They checked the name of

Kenna's uncle immediately and learned that the suspect had lied about the party. It had been given at his uncle's, but the week before.

"No doubt in my mind," cogitated Claren, "Kenna is the man who wrote the love note, the killer of the pretty maid who spurned his passionate advances. He is the one Anna Schmid mentioned to Mrs. Kade having an uncle in Montclair. The only difference is that the uncle is a bank clerk instead of a doctor."

"Were you in love with Anna Schmid?" asked Meagher.

MOMENTARILY startled, Kenna looked up fixedly and then denied any knowledge of the girl.

"You wrote this note, didn't you?" snapped Claren, showing the letter found in Anna Schmid's room. "And then you killed her. Why don't you admit it and save our time?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," shouted Kenna.

"You scrawled it to disguise your own handwriting because you already had in mind murdering this girl if she spurned

you. It was cold-blooded, pre-meditated murder."

But the suspect looked up defiantly. "I never saw the girl in my life," he said, as flame-points of desire flickered in his brown eyes every time the captain mentioned the girl's name.

Finally, Patrolman Cummings and gateman Maddock were rushed down to the Newark Police Headquarters. Each identified Kenna as the man they had seen the night of the crime, except that he was now wearing a grey suit instead of the brown.

"Yes," Cummings asserted. "He's the man I saw walking up and down in front of the Bellevue Theater the night the girl was murdered."

"That's right! I was at that theater. I remember now," said Kenna. "Sure, I remember. I was in that movie until 11 o'clock."

"All right, where's that brown suit you were wearing?" asked Captain Claren.

"That?" Kenna thought a minute. "Oh, yes—I needed some money, so I pawned it and then I sold the pawn ticket to a New York taxi driver."

CLAREN had to have that brown suit—and badly. But the task of finding one taxi driver among the 14,578 registered in the five boroughs of New York City in 1935—one taxi driver who held a pawn ticket for a brown suit—was a staggering one. Nevertheless, with the help of the New York City police, Claren tackled the job.

And Claren found his man, a fellow called "Slim." He had bought Kenna's pawn ticket and gotten the brown suit, worn it a couple of days and then resold it to a driver named Paradiso because it did not fit him well enough.

Claren started all over again. In a few days, out of a dozen of taximen of the same name, the wanted Paradiso turned up. "I got the suit," he said.

"Where is it? Where is it?" asked Claren anxiously.

"Aw, it didn't fit me—so I sold it to the Weaver Pawn Shop on Delancey Street."

Claren went back to Newark with the brown suit.

Confronted with the indestructible evidence, the psy-

chological effect on Kenna was instantaneous. He slumped in his chair, all defiance gone. He confessed.

**H**E HAD MET Anna six months before while they waited for a bus to Newark. They had gone out together a few times. When he made his intention known to her, she stopped seeing him. He had approached her several times, but she repulsed him. But as time went by, "her sweet smile pecked at my brain. It drove me crazy." In a desperate attempt he wrote her a note, begged her to meet him. When she failed to show up he became enraged. That night he waited for her until he saw her

step off the bus. He followed her and then struck her twice from behind. Believing she was dead, he hurried to catch a bus to Newark and then a train to New York. There he tossed the stiletto he had used into the Hudson River.

Joseph F. Kenna went on trial in Judge Daniel J. Brennan's court. On June 25, 1935, he was allowed to plead non vult, throwing himself completely at the mercy of the court. And because he had spent 28 months in the Grey-stone Park Hospital for the Insane, he was sentenced to life imprisonment at the State prison in Trenton, where he still is an inmate.



A Fast-Moving Tale of Girls and Guns

## The Three Avengers



by Cos Barat  
*leads off the Sept.*

## WESTERN ACTION

Now on sale at all stands

**where  
evil  
lurks**

by Wade B.  
Rubottom

Chip Rand's murder scheme was successful, all right — much too successful, in fact...

CHIP RAND'S sharp features twisted a forbidding scowl at the sea. Today, fog-domed, it embodied all his hatreds. Its surface seemed to hide a lurking evil, like an oilskin blanket over a restless corpse.

When the fog signal at the San Pedro Lighthouse no longer reached him, his thin lips set in a satisfied smirk. "This is a good place to die," he told himself, "...for Wally Allen, that is."

They'd been friends for most of their twenty-nine years. Wally had always treated him like a kid brother. It never bothered Chip.... Then came Ava Hendricks.

With her came a painful awareness of his nickname, his kid-brother role. Wally was tall, dark—and, Ava thought—handsome. Suddenly, Chip hated tall guys; most of all, he hated Wally Allen.

Determinedly, Chip idled the engine and shifted the gear control to neutral. From the companionway, he briefly watched the white plume curling from the engine exhaust blend with the fog.

His smirk spread comfort-

ably. He had cut Wally down to size. Last night after the first drink, it hadn't been difficult; hangover and ground swell fixed him this morning.

Tall, self-confident Wally Allen, a guy who'd pulled a forty-foot auxiliary cutter out of raw materials, getting seasick!

CHIP HAD considered boat building a waste of time and money. He'd gone along only to be near Ava. How wrong could a guy be? The boat was worth a lot of dough—as Wally had promised; but now the lug refused to sell.

Their lawyer-written agreement would take care of that: *If either of the co-partners die, his interest in this joint venture shall pass to the surviving partner.* The agreement didn't mention Ava. Chip brushed his thin lips with the hair on the back of his stubby fingers.

A ground swell rolled the *Ava A*, as if it hated her the way Chip hated the sea. He grinned; soon he'd be free of all hate. Already he was sorry for Wally. Chip would take care of him—he had a remedy for seasickness.

He fingered into pigskin gloves, then dropped to the galley. Moving quickly now, he got a beer from the icebox, jabbed the bottle potato-masher-fashion at the thermometer over the racked drinking glasses.

"Damn!" he said for Wally's ears. "I broke the thermometer."

"So what?" Wally's weak voice drifted aft. "Get me to Newport before I die."

Chip uncapped and up-ended the bottle in a glass. He went forward, bracing himself against the *Ava A*'s roll.

"Here's a hair of the dog," Chip loaded his voice with sympathy. "It'll do you good."

Wally filled the long berth. From a putty-colored face, his red-veined eyes struggled to show thanks. His big hand groped for the glass. "Nothing'll do me good."

Chip tried to ignore the closed portholes, the sour stench of vomit. He couldn't stand much of this, or watch his friend die—he was no sadist.

Again on deck, he lipped the half-empty bottle. The beer tasted good. He stowed the

empty alongside the fog horn in a corner of the cockpit.

**A**S HE STOOD up, the *Ava A* lurched. Chip's feet skated; he hit the deck, and pain knifed his left arm and shoulder. "Damn!" he muttered. Wally had warned him about tennis shoes and wet decks. But Chip wasn't wasting money on fancy topsiders—he wasn't sailing much longer.

Wally also had warned: "Always trail a life line when sailing alone." Chip grinned; he was sailing alone.

In memory of Wally, he belayed a half-inch Manila line to a cleat, tossed it astern, and placed it through a chock—just as big, clumsy Wally advised. He wondered if he had belayed it to Wally's satisfaction? The guy had a phobia about knots.

He stood with one foot on the taffrail and one hand on the permanent backstay. The rise and fall of the deck was greatest here; he never got seasick.

A crash of glass below told him: The *Ava A* was his to sell. He admired her dollar-value—forty feet of Wally's

craftsmanship. The stainless steel backstay, taut, strong, and unyielding felt good. He felt good; all his hatred was gone.

The sway of the mast held his eyes like an accusing finger. Ava held his thoughts....

**A** MOAN, and Wally's ghastly face in the companionway, jerked him back to now.

"I need a doctor. I..." He glanced at the gear control. "Why aren't we underway?", he demanded, as if Chip were a student in his woodworking class at Poly. "Why aren't you sounding the fog horn?"

"Lecturing with your last breath!"

"What do you mean?"

"I poisoned you." Chip jabbed a hairy finger at his flat chest. "I'm selling the *Ava A*. I want all the dough. I want..."

"You're crazy, Chip." Wally exhaled impatiently.

"Crazy?" Chip sneered. "At Newport, I'll explain: 'I was at the wheel. Wally Allen came to the companionway, poured a glass of beer, handed me the half-empty bottle, and went back to his berth.'" A chuckle joined his sneer. "They'll find

the broken thermometer over the glass rack—and see that mercury from its tube could easily have dropped into the glass. They'll write off Wally Allen: *Accidental Death.*"

Conviction dawned in Wally's distorted face. "You poisoned me for money!"

"Money? uh-huh...and Ava. I've wanted her a long time." He saw that Wally, the dim-wit, had never suspected.

Wally broke their stare. He shifted the gear control, reached for the throttle.

All Chip's hate hadn't died. His fist ached for Wally's handsome face; he lunged at him.

But he didn't reach Wally. His tennis shoes skated on the wet deck. The gunned engine prop-washed the rudder, kicked the *Ava A*'s stern away. Instead of Wally, Chip hit the sea.

He clawed to the surface. Saw *Ava A* in gold letters on a mahogany transom, racing away. Water drowned his oath. He grasped the life line. "Hey, Wally! Bring her about."

Wally crawled aft. From Chip's low angle of perspective, he was a head without a body.

CHIP PULLED himself along the life line. Pain pierced his left arm and shoulder. Through white-churned wake and choking exhaust fumes, he pulled. Almost sapped, he called again, "Wally! For God's sake stop that engine. Help me aboard."

"Chip," Wally's voice fought the staccato engine exhaust, "if you poisoned me, and I die, this line will slip through my hands, like this... You'll see the *Ava A* cruise into the fog."

"I was kidding, Wally. I didn't poison you; you're seasick." Then he realized that Wally couldn't have slipped that much line if he hadn't been hauling him in. Good old Wally never let anyone down.

Again Wally hauled in the line, reach after reach. "I'll get you aboard. I hardly tasted that beer—the glass slipped from my hand. I'll get you aboard."

Chip didn't like his tone. But once aboard, he'd handle Wally. "Stop the engine; it'll be easier." If he didn't stop the engine, Chip couldn't pull himself aboard after Wally died.

Then with the moving fog, a plume from the engine exhaust bathed Wally's face. He retched...vomited. With two convulsive gasps, his head rolled on his cheek. Like the head of John the Baptist on Salome's platter, it rested on the taffrail, its vacant eyes fixed on Chip.

Chip's hands clutched the life line. His fingers ached.

**A**T TIMES, with the surge of the sea, the *Ava A*'s hull disappeared; at times, Chip looked down on her comfortable deck—a hundred and fifty feet away. Always her tall mast had an accusing-finger-like sway.

His sodden wool shirt and trousers were weighing him down. He wasn't being towed through the water; the distance between him and the *Ava A* had increased. Cold fear stung him.

Slowly, the line grew taut again; water dripped from its flattening curve to the deck chock. Its pull was a shot of confidence.

Dead or seasick, Wally Allen didn't matter. Chip

would get aboard. He fought off his shirt and trousers. He waited for the downside of the next surge then pulled along the line, kicking fast. He waited again, resting.

A grin spread his thin lips. He had gained twelve feet—or more. This was a cinch.

Without warning, with the *Ava A*'s cresting the next surge, it happened, almost too fast to see, too dreadful to believe. The life-line end whipped high, fell into the sea.

Just as if Wally were telling him, Chip knew he hadn't belayed the line properly.

He tasted a bitter salt. He watched the *Ava A* fade away. Veil after veil of fog drifted between them. Finally a veil masked the plume of her engine exhaust.

Alone. Doomed in the sea he hated. A sudden horror drummed an awful din—like a stereophonic sound track of a beer bottle rolling in a cockpit...

With the din came a terrifying truth. Too late, Chip Rand knew: Nothing evil lurks beneath the sea. Evil lurks in the minds of all men.

the  
bridge  
at  
night

by GEORGE H. SMITH

*What was the secret of this man who walked the lonely bridge, waiting for those who came to plunge themselves from it?*

THE BRIDGE echoed to the hollow sound of my footfalls, and the fog blew in off the sea in scattered gusts that seemed to make the huge steel and concrete monster shiver as though from the deep cold that only a sea wind can bring.

I was walking as I had so many, many nights before along the walkway of the bridge, with only the sea wind and the occasional lights of a passing car to interrupt my vigil. Through the years I had learned to know these nights well, nights when the parallel rows of shining light globes were the only thing that gave reality to the bridge which seemed to hang suspended in quivering darkness with no beginning and no end.

These were the nights when curtains of mist hid the city's lights and isolated me with the bridge and the sea wind. And these were the nights when they came, the lonely figures pacing the walkways. They came alone and waited until the traffic thinned out so they could have the bridge and the fast-running tide below to themselves.

**T**ONIGHT it was a girl, a girl in a light tan raincoat with a natural leather over-the-shoulder bag swinging jauntily under her left arm. I had spotted her earlier, alone and pacing slowly. I had seen too many of them not to know she would be back. So I wasn't surprised when I saw her stop and place her bag and coat carefully down inside the railing and stand looking moodily into the dark below.

"That isn't really what you want to do, is it?" I said stepping out of the fog close to her side.

Her head jerked around. She was young, younger than I had thought, and quite pretty in a thin, pale way. When I had seen her earlier in the evening, her face had been heavily made up and had looked older. Now the makeup was gone and her face was as white as though she were already in the sea.

"I...you frightened me..." she said staring, trying to make out my face in the mist.

"Do you frighten easily?" I asked.

"No...not usually," she said and shrugged thin shoulders.

"Then why let fear drive you here tonight?"

Her eyes avoided mine as she said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I think you do know," I said. "I wouldn't jump if I were you."

"You a cop or something?" she sneered picking up her purse and coat and started to walk away. I reached out a hand to stop her and I could feel the warm life beneath the thin dress. She jerked away and leaned on the railing again. "Well, you're not me. You couldn't possibly be me and you couldn't have my reasons."

"No one could ever have enough reasons for what you were thinking of doing."

"I'm still thinking of doing it," she snapped. "What're you going to do... Arrest me? I hear it's against the law. But then everything is against the law if you're like me."

"I'm not here to arrest you. I'm just here to try to convince you that you mustn't jump."

"Oh? And how do you do that?" She laughed bitterly. "How do you know how tough things can get?"

"Perhaps I do know," I said quietly.

**P**ERHAPS I do know," she mimicked me. "You ever been on the street copper? No, I suppose not. You don't look the type."

"Whatever you are, and whatever you may have been through, it's better than that." I said, gesturing at the darkness below. "That is the only thing that can never be changed, the only thing that regret can never help, the one mistake from which there is no turning back."

"So who wants to turn back?"

"I think that everyone who has ever jumped from here has wanted to turn back."

"When? In mid air?"

"Then...or later," I replied taking her arm. "Look, I may not be able to change your mind but would you be willing to walk with me a little way and listen to a story I'd like to tell you?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Sure, why not? I've got more time than anything and I understand one part of this bridge is as good as any other."

"No part of it is any good," I told her as I thought about how to begin my story. "This bridge has a curse on it."

"Oh come on now...a big grown man like you."

"It's a story the fishermen around here tell and it's not very pretty," I said. "But at least one part of it is known to be true."

"What's that?" she asked without any sign of interest.

"That in all the years the bridge has been here between sea and sky, many have done what you intend to do."

"So this is news?"

"But none of the bodies have ever been found."

"Hell!" she said, "I knew that. Why do you think I picked *this* bridge? That way you're gone for good with no trouble for anyone."

"Not one of the scores who have hurled themselves over that railing have ever been found. There's a strange, freak ebb-tide down below that washes them out to sea."

**T**HE GIRL shivered, but said defiantly, "So who wants to be found? It'll save the city burial costs. How

about that, copper? Why should you worry so long as it ain't gonna cost the city nothing."

"I'm not really a cop," I said.

"Not a cop? Then what the hell are you doing butting into my business?" she said angrily pulling away from me.

"Wait! Please wait. You haven't heard the rest of the story the fishermen tell."

"Oh, all right. Go ahead, but make it snappy. I'm getting cold—and besides, I got an appointment to keep," she giggled.

"The fishermen say that the tide that carries the bodies away isn't a natural tide. They say that it carries them into an eddy that is partly of this sea and this world, and partly of a sea and world not of this time, nor of any real time. The old fishermen say that because those who have taken their lives, by jumping from this cursed bridge as did the man who built it—jumping to find the easy way out—are doomed to float out there all together in this eddy of limbo. The fishermen say that they have heard them crying but

that when they approach the sound, there is nothing. The dead who are not dead are floating in their own grisly school, never at rest, always disturbed by the churning seas, and the dirge of the sea gulls that circle above them."

The girl's eyes had grown wide and her breath came faster as I talked. "Do they stay that way forever?"

"Forever. Or at least until the time comes when no others join them from the bridge."

SHE LOOKED at me closely, to see if I were serious and I could see how tightly she clutched the strap of her bag. "This is just a story, isn't it?" she asked hesitantly. "When you're dead, you're dead. There isn't any afterwards of any kind. None like you talk about and none like the preachers talk about."

"The fishermen believe it," I said. "The bridge is cursed."

"But why ... why this bridge?"

"The man who built it threw himself into the sea on the day it was completed." I said. "He was sick and afraid to face an operation."

She shivered again and buttoned up her coat against the chill of the night. "It's cold," she said through chattering teeth, "colder than a cop's heart."

"It's colder out there," I said pointing across the railing.

"Yeah. Maybe you're right. But I get so tired...so scared..." Her voice trailed off.

"There are other places to go, other things to do."

"I don't know... I don't know. Once a gal gets into this business, it seems like there's no way to get out."

"As I told you," I said gently, "there's only one mistake from which there's no turning back."

She shivered again, more violently this time. "Maybe... maybe you're right. Maybe I could find something else..."

"There's a man named Townsend who has an office in the Munro Building. I

talked to him one night years ago on the bridge. Tell him we talked. He'll understand and help you."

"Thanks, mister...thanks." She put out her hand and I took it in mine. "Say, you're pretty cold yourself. You better get in out of the night."

"Yes," I said as she turned to leave, "I'm very cold."

She turned back to me. "That story you told me...it was...just a story, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was just a story," I said and she waved and walked away.

As I watched her slim back disappear into the fog, as I saw her walk away to try again, I gathered courage and started back myself. I didn't want to go back but I knew that I must. It was only on nights such as this that I could walk on the bridge I had built. Now I was going back to where the others waited for me, in the restless waves where the seagulls circled forever overhead.



Novelet

**SHE  
SAW  
NO  
EVIL**

by Julius  
Elman

*Why was this gorgeous blonde impersonating socialite Celia Cressman—and why was she blasted down at noon by a shotgun?*



BART MILLER nipped the red light at the corner, did a swirling S through the slow-moving traffic, and braked his battered old Buick convertible to a squealing stop in front of his office on Diamond Street, a narrow mid-city thoroughfare

just a block off the avenues of swank shops and teeming department stores.

A picture spread on a page of the day old tabloid on the seat beside him caught his eye as he twisted the key, and he picked up the paper and read the caption. The caption said that the white-haired, well-to-do spinster, Miss Lila Jones, who lived alone in the big house on Brewster Street, had been strangled by a pair of powerful hands and slugged with a blunt object. The caption added that a set of fingerprints, other than those of the murdered woman's, had been found in the great profusion throughout the house.

Miller folded the paper, edged over and got out of the car on the curb side. He slammed the car door, tugged at the coat of his blue worsted suit, pulled at his green snap-brim hat, then started toward a door in one of the small, dingy brick buildings that were jammed together in one continuous line down the entire length of the block. The chipped black letters on the glass of the door said B. MILLER, INVESTIGATIONS.

Then the high, whining sound of slipping tires shrilled in Miller's ears. He jerked his head around and saw that a black, glittering limousine, a uniformed chauffeur at the wheel, had turned at high speed into narrow Diamond Street from a side street. Bart caught a glimpse of a girl wearing a black veil sitting in a corner in the back.

Suddenly brakes squealed; a frighten-faced, droop-moustached day laborer, bent over the handlebars of an ancient bicycle, had wavered into the swift arc the shining limousine was making. The big car shuddered as it fought the grip of the tires; the chauffeur twisted the wheel. There was a harsh scream. Then the limousine skidded...and crashed tinnily into the rear of Bart Miller's parked convertible!

WHEN MILLER yanked the front door of the limousine open, just ahead of the rapidly converging passersby, the uniformed chauffeur was slumped over the wheel, unconscious, blood oozing from a cut in his forehead. His passenger, a breathless tangle of thin

rose-tinted silk and smooth symmetry, was getting bewilderedly up from the floor in the back. She got up on the seat, adjusted her deranged dark ensemble—far too dark and sombre for the bright October morning—and arranged a heavy black veil, streaming down from a small black hat, over her face. Under the thick veil, her face was a white, indistinguishable blur. Expensive perfume emanated in thick, pleasant waves. She was blonde, Bart noted with approval.

She stared at Miller and said, "Oh-h, my—my goodness!"

"Hurt?" Miller asked.

"No-o. No, I'm all right. How about him?" came from behind the filmy black silk masking the girl's face.

Bart Miller turned to the chauffeur. The man was still unconscious and his cigaret was smouldering on the upholstery of the seat. Miller stubbed the cigaret and looked thoughtfully at the man. The chauffeur's eyes were closed, his brown pushed-together little face was calm, and he was breathing evenly.

Bart's eyes swept lower to where the coat of the unconscious man's uniform was pushed back, and he gasped sharply. A sheaf of currency, a thousand dollar bill on the outside, stuck up out of the inside pocket!

"Let's take him into my office," Miller said, and twitched at the lapel of the uniform coat, making the money disappear.

In the cluttered up little office, the girl said: "I'm—I'm Celia Cressman. You know me, don't you?"

"Celia Cressman..." Miller tried unsuccessfully to penetrate the thick veil. "I've seen you on the society pages of the papers. Cressman... Yeah, I thought I recognized that car and the chauffeur. Grayson is this guy's name, isn't it? I've seen him at..."

"Yes." The society girl nodded. "I'll be glad to pay for any damage to your car, of course, Mr. Miller."

Miller nodded, gave his attention to Grayson.

WHEN THE chauffeur had recovered, Miller and Celia Cressman walked him

out to the car. "Oh, I forgot my handbag! I left it on your desk!" the society girl exclaimed, taking her foot off the running board of the car and spinning about. "I'll..."

Miller followed her back into the office, stopped her on the way out. "By the way, Miss Cressman," he said casually, laying a lean hand on her arm. "Does Grayson carry large sums of money around with him on his person? Say, five hundred dollars or so?"

"No-o. Not that I know of. Where in the world would he get such a large sum of money?" The society girl opened her brown suede handbag. Something inside, too small for a compact or lipstick holder, gleamed dully, like beaten gold. "I haven't enough money with me, I know," Celia Cressman said. "Send me the bill for your car, will you?"

Bart Miller watched the trimly built society girl open the office door, step into the corridor that led to the street. He reached into his pocket, pulled out the sheaf of currency he had taken from Grayson's pocket. He thumbed it over rapidly and whistled in

sheer amazement. Twenty-six thousand dollars in thousand dollar bills!

**B**ART MILLER raised his eyes to stare at Celia Cressman's back moving across the pavement toward the limousine. Grayson he could see, was lighting another cigaret. Miller drifted out into the corridor to see better. Suddenly he pulled up short, and a slow-moving blue Ford sedan made his eyes narrow. It contained three pasty-faced youths, and the look on their faces... He yelled. The girl saw them at the same time and screamed. She tried to run toward the big car at the curb.

But a sawed-off shotgun was poked across the ledge of the rolled-down window of the blue Ford. It roared, gushed orange flame and white-grey smoke. The girl's scream, thin, high, terror-ridden, was choked off and she disappeared below the level of the glass part of the door at the street end of the corridor.

Cursing, Miller reached with his left hand and jerked the gun out of the holster under his right arm. He pulled out

onto the pavement, but already the Ford was moving away, weaving down Diamond Street, boring through holes in the traffic.

Miller, because he had already seen them once, could still make out the individuality of the passengers. A prematurely bald youth behind the wheel; beside him the bushy-haired, unbelievably short, squat youth, less than five feet tall, who had used the shotgun; and in the back of the blue sedan, a tall, good-looking chap who wore a dark pinstripe suit and a gray felt hat. Miller remembered he had waved frantically with his right hand—a hand that was curiously white and shriveled.

The blue sedan cut into a side street, disappearing, and Bart Miller holstered his gun and went over to the crowd already collecting around the girl crumpled up on the pavement. As he did so, Grayson pulled rapidly away from the curb. Miller stared open-mouthed after the Cressman limousine, then began to elbow through the crowd. A hatless, coatless drunk, his bloated face stubbled with silver bristles, broke

through at the same time Miller did. The drunk stared down for a long moment, then quietly turned away. A man who had a trim fawn-colored moustache, whose bulging brown eyes were neatly centered behind rimmed glasses, also turned away, one hand clutching a brief-case, the other pressed against his stomach...

Miller didn't blame him; the shotgun slugs had caught the girl in the region of the buckle of her cloth belt. Blood streamed thickly, erratically on the pavement. The thick black veil had been tossed to one side, revealing her even, unmarked features. Her brown suede bag popped open, and again Miller saw the dully gleaming gold object...

Miller fingered it; it was a small, gold monkey, evidently one of a see-no-evil, hear-no-evil, speak-no-evil set. Ironically, this was see-no-evil, with the tiny gold paws pressed against the eyes. Miller hesitated, then palmed the small object. He rifled through the contents of the brown suede bag; there was nothing of importance. Just papers and a driver's li-

cense bearing the name of Celia Cressman.

A cop came shoving through. Miller rose. "Hello, Steve," he said grimly. "It's a job for Bullock and Homicide."

Steve Workman, the cop on the beat, stared down, his lips forming words that sounded almost like a prayer.

**B**ULLOCK, chief inspector of the homicide squad, eyed Bart Miller hostilely. He was a well-built man with a chalk-white face and icy blue eyes that had yellowish circles under them.

"I know Celia Cressman well by sight," he said coldly. "I tell you that dame out there isn't Celia Cressman."

Miller was sitting on the edge of his battered desk, one leg swinging free. He said, "I know it. I lifted that black veil after she was murdered and looked."

"What do you make of it?"

Miller shrugged and said, "There's something screwy somewhere. Of course, her fingerprints will tell you who she is—if they're on file."

Bullock growled.

Miller ignored the sound. "You know, it will be interesting to learn who she actually is. She said she was Celia Cressman; her handbag said Celia Cressman; her perfume said Celia Cressman. And she even looked like Celia Cressman. Also, she was in the Cressman car, and the Cressman chauffeur was driving. Grayson and the big black limousine didn't wear veils, you know, and I'm sure of them. It's an odd set-up, all right. Clearly an impersonation, of course. But why? And, while we're at it, how?"

Bullock growled again. "Okay, wise guy. Only God help you if you're holding anything back on me, that's all."

Miller could feel the money against him. "I wouldn't hold anything back, Bullock. Not me."

Bullock grimaced sourly. "What about the three guys in the Ford?"

"I've told you all I know about them."

There was a silence during which the activity of the police and homicide squad outside the office on Diamond Street shoved into the room.

"By the way," Miller said

casually, "there was a kidnap case—the Bishop case, I think—about two weeks ago. Anything new on that? Any ransom money been recovered?"

"No. Why?"

"Oh, it's just that I've got something on the order of a public conscience," Miller shrugged. "If I see a chance to do something for the good of mankind in general, I..."

"Stow it." Bullock growled.

When Bullock had left, Bart Miller looked up a clipping in his files and found the serial numbers of the money involved in the Bishop kidnapping case. None of the numbers compared with those on the thousand dollar bills, and the ransom had been paid in ten and twenties.

Miller went over the twenty-six bills with a powerful glass, deduced they weren't counterfeit, then put them in his pocket and jammed his green felt hat on his head. He locked the office behind him and pushed through the assortment of homicide men, uniformed cops and the curious still milling around outside.

"I'll be around," he told Bullock.

"You better be," the homicide man growled.

"Be seeing you," Miller said to Steve Workman.

"So long, Bart," Steve said in a low voice..

CELIA CRESSMAN lived alone with her crippled brother, Arthur Cressman, on Garrick Road in a swank, semi-rural suburban section north of the city. They had but one servant—Grayson. Aside from the fact that Celia Cressman was socially prominent, Miller hadn't been able to learn much else about her.

He had to drive slowly along winding Garrick Road, as he was reading the names printed on the mail boxes. He read the name Cressman finally and swung the nose of his battered Buick convertible in through an aperture in a high stone wall surrounding a big property.

The house, situated at the apex of the arc made by the curving drive, was huge and white, with tall pillars, long windows, and flat porticos on the wings. It was hemmed in on all sides by trees resplendant in their fall yellows, reds and purples.

As Bart Miller pulled up at the front, a skinny-legged little girl, with long, dark curls, scrambled off the stone terrace that supported the base of the big pillars and ran shyly around the side of the house.

Celia Cressman opened the door herself. "Come in," she said blankly when Miller introduced himself. She was a striking resemblance to the girl whose torso had been all but cut in two by the tearing shotgun slugs.

She walked ahead of Miller down a hall, past rooms crammed full of period furniture, French a couple of Louis' or so before the Revolution, Miller judged vaguely. It was heavy, massive stuff and was complemented by thick rugs, big oil paintings, marble mantels and sombre hangings.

Celia Cressman was dressed in bright blue. A pleated blue skirt and a long-sleeved, trimly fitted blue jacket. A huge white collar, froth of lace at her throat, and white lacy cuffs accented the bright blue.

Her hair was golden blonde and was done in long, smooth waves and reached below her shoulders. Eying her critically

from the back, starting at her high-heeled blue shoes, Miller could see no reason for disapproval.

The society girl walked past an iron-bannistered marble stairs, held back a velour drape and stepped aside and ushered Miller into a big, sunny, high-ceilinged room. A fire blazed in a stone fireplace. A huge mottled great dane rose growling deep in his throat. A deep voice said commandingly, "Down, Mr. Jim!"

BART MILLER stared at the owner of the voice. The man would be Arthur Cressman, Celia's brother. He sat in a wheel chair, a navy blue blanket over his lap. His broad pale face was amiable and broadened into a grin. "Don't mind Mr. Jim," he said as the huge dog settled back on its haunches on the rug, its black-jowled face hostile, its yellow eyes intent on Miller.

Celia introduced her brother. Arthur Cressman reached out; he had a crushing grip, Miller learned. His eyes crinkled. "You know—you look like a private detective," he said; then his mouth opened

and a booming laugh gushed through the room, making Mr. Jim cock his pointed ears and drowning out the hiss of the fire.

Miller removed his hand from Cressman's grip. He studied the cripple. Cressman was a big man, with thick chestnut hair parted in the middle. He wore a wine-colored sport shirt and a checkered black and white tweed coat.

"As a matter of fact, I am a private detective," Miller said calmly.

Again Arthur Cressman's booming laugh rolled out again. "See? Can I pick 'em?" he demanded jovially of his sister.

"What can we do for you, Mr. Miller?" Celia Cressman asked coldly. She had remained standing and hadn't asked Bart to sit down.

"It is really your chauffeur I want to see, Miss Cressman," Miller said.

"Our chauffeur? Grayson? Why in the world...? Well it doesn't matter, I suppose. But he isn't here."

Miller's face was blandly blank. "Not here?" he said gently. "Are you sure?"

A FROWN appeared on Celia Cressman's smooth forehead; a delicate, angry flush tinted the column of her neck, and a vein throbbed on her temple. "Of course, I'm sure!" she snapped. "I said so, didn't I?"

"Celia!" Arthur Cressman said warningly.

"It's very important," Miller added.

"Well, I tell you he isn't here!" the girl flung back. Her blue eyes were oblong and narrow and the angry flush had spread up into her taut face. "What do I have to do?" she demanded. "Produce an affidavit? Really, you have a nerve coming into my house, doubting my word like—like..."

"Celia!" Arthur Cressman said sharply.

"Oh..." The girl bit at her lower lip; her hands unclenched and her neck became soft and moulded again. Mr. Jim let his deep growls smoulder on for a few seconds before they died.

"Celia is a bit high-strung and nervous," Arthur Cressman apologized amiably. His booming laugh began to ripple.

"You know how it is with girls nowadays..."

"I'm—I'm sorry," Celia said in a low voice. She looked at Miller, and all the fire was gone from her eyes. "Why did you want to see Grayson?" she said meekly.

"Do you know anything of a blonde who, less than an hour ago, might have been impersonating you?" Miller countered.

"Impersonating me?" Celia said sharply. "Good heavens, no!"

"A blonde who looks very much like you. About your height and all. Same kind of features, even..."

"I don't know anything about such a person!" Celia snapped; the vein on her temple began to twitch.

"Why do you speak of this impersonation?" Arthur Cressman said quickly.

"Because the impersonator is dead—murdered," Bart Miller said slowly.

"Murdered!" Celia Cressman gasped. "Oh! My—my merciful heavens' I mean—why, that's horrible!"

"Tell us what's happened," Arthur Cressman prompted.

SLOWLY, choosing his words with care, Bart Miller told his story. He avoided all mention of the twenty-six thousand dollars.

"I don't know what to make of it," Celia said at the conclusion. "I am completely bewildered."

"I looked at the shop label sewn in the suit this girl was wearing," Miller said. "—Where do you buy most of your clothes?"

"Why—why, at a well-known shop," the society girl said hesitantly. "At Launers."

"Launers—that's where that dark suit that girl was wearing came from!"

"I—I am completely bewildered," Celia repeated.

"Are you sure there isn't something that might throw a light?" Miller said.

Celia shook her head firmly. "No."

"Some little fact?" Miller prompted.

Again the society girl's soft throat became corded and taut. Her face flushed, and the vein on her temple throbbed. Her hands clenched, and her teeth showed as her scarlet lips peeled back. "I told you I was

completely in the dark!" she raged throatily. "Completely in the dark! Why do you persist in your insinuations? Why? Tell me! I demand it!"

Mr. Jim rose growling. Again Arthur Cressman soothed the angry girl.

She relaxed. "Oh, I'm so sorry," she said contritely. "This rotten temper of mine. Please forgive me." A wan smile quivered at one corner of her mouth. "Tell me. Why did this poor girl—? How did she happen to be in our car, do you suppose? Do you think Grayson picked her up, or...?"

"I didn't ask her any questions; I thought she was Celia Cressman," Miller said.

"Oh..." Celia looked sharply at the private detective. Her small white teeth nipped at her lower lip. "I see." Her mouth took on the outline of a smile. "Well, Mr. Miller, I'll see that the damage to your car is paid for, anyway."

Bart nodded. "Thanks." He looked at Arthur Cressman. "Is your chauffeur very affluent?" he asked smoothly. "That is, does he carry large sums of money around with

him? Maybe a thousand dollars or so?"

"No," Celia Cressman said quickly. "He just has his salary."

Bart Miller nodded again. "Okay," he sighed. He twisted his green felt hat in his hands, then looked at Arthur Cressman again. "There will be a visit by detectives," he warned. "They'll want to see Grayson themselves, and they'll have a few questions of their own to ask..."

"We can't tell them any more than we've told you," Arthur Cressman said. He shifted in the wheelchair by pushing against the wide armrests. "Er—Mr. Miller," he said slowly, "ah—just what is the point of your visit out here? Why did you ask those questions and why do you want to see Grayson?"

"I am cursed with a public conscience," Miller said wryly, but in a way that precluded any further questioning. "Oh, and by the way," he added off-handedly, "you don't happen to have a little gold monkey about as big as your thumbnail around the place, do you?"

Arthur Cressman shook his

head. "All we have in that line is a dog the size of a young elephant and who eats us out of house and home!" His laugh came again, easily, rippling resonantly through the big house.

BART MILLER drove back toward his office on Diamond Street. He could feel the twenty-six thousand dollars pressing against him. He was worried. He couldn't do a thing with the money until he found Grayson. Obviously something was very much wrong—the mysterious blonde who looked so much like Celia Cressman, the Cressmans themselves, the three young punks in the blue Ford, and the twenty-six thousand, all added up to wrong. But he regretted the hasty impulse that had prompted him to take the money. Supposing, by some twist or other, Bullock was able to slap a grand larceny charge on him? Bullock didn't like private detectives, and Miller could easily picture the glee on the homicide man's face were that to happen.

Struck by a sudden thought, Miller turned right at a green light and drove to his apart-

ment house. He used the self-service elevator to raise him to the fifth floor of the big modern building and he hid the twenty-six thousand dollars in his apartment.

The body was gone and the crowd had disappeared when Miller pulled up in front of his office. He saw Steve Workman and waited till the cop, his buttons and leather gleaming against the dark blue of his uniform, had come up to the car and placed one big foot on the running board. Steve had a red, humorous face, not made any handsomer by a badly set broken nose.

Miller offered Steve a cigaret from a box of extra-longs. "Have they identified the girl?" he asked.

Steve took a cigaret, looked behind him quickly, as though he expected to see Bullock, then said: "This is off the record. Don't let anybody know I told you. You know how it is—some of the big shots like Bullock don't like you, and that don't make it any easier for a guy like me trying to get along, see?"

"Shoot," Miller said, a cigaret between his lips.

"WELL, THE fingerprints of that girl are the same as those they found in the home of the old lady who was murdered night before last on Brewster Street..."

"That old maid—Miss Lila Jones?" Bart Miller said sharply, pausing with the match he had used to light his cigaret with still burning between his fingers.

"Yeah, that's her name. Her picture was in the tabloids yesterday. She was strangled and bopped with a sap or hunk of lead pipe."

"Have they uncovered a motive for that murder?" Miller asked.

"I don't think so. I didn't hear anything."

"It couldn't have been twenty-six thousand dollars, could it?"

"It could be, maybe, I dunno. Why do you ask?"

Miller sighed, blew fragrant smoke. "I don't know. Even that doesn't make sense, exactly. In fact, nothing makes sense, Steve."

BREWSTER STREET. Miller frowned. The number of Miss Lila Jones' house, accord-

ing to the day-old tabloid was 11. That would be that big house on the left; an ugly old-fashioned place, fronted by an iron fence and terrace. It was one of many rundown old-fashioned dwellings lining Brewster Street, most of which had been given over to three-story rooming houses.

Miller drifted past warily. The place looked deserted. That didn't make sense; that wasn't Bullock. A cop or two should be around somewhere. Miller studied the house on the other side of the street; a rooms for rent sign was in a window. That was better.

He drove around the block and parked the convertible on the next street. He ducked through an alley between a house and a brick store building, came up to the rear of number eleven on Brewster Street through a maze of boardedin back yards and cement courts criss-crossed with lines of wash.

He used his bunch of skeleton keys on the back door. The lock was old-fashioned like the rest of the place and yielded to the third key.

He searched the place quick-

ly. Nothing that threw any light on the blonde or the twenty-six thousand came to his attention. He stood frowning in what must have been the old lady's sitting room. A dark little room furnished with overstuffed, plush-covered furniture. A bit of paper lying near the edge of the gray mound of ashes in the cold, blackened fireplace caught his eye.

He picked it up.

The letters *Patty Br*—were all that the fire had left. Still squatting, Bart Miller dropped the charred fragment into his pocket and poked around in the powdery ashes for more. He turned up something that gleamed even through its dusty coat of ashes.

He blew it off, then rose and strode quickly across the room to a window. He turned the little object in his hand, letting the bright sun play upon it. It was a little gold monkey with its paws clamped over its ears. Hear-no-evil! He took see-no-evil from this pocket and compared the two. They belonged to the same set!

He remained by the window, his head bent, staring at the two little objects of rough,

hammered gold. Suddenly, with the speed and suddenness of the leap of a waiting tiger, something descended with terrific force on his skull!

A RED AND yellow gash of flame seared his brain, and his knees buckled like hollow stems of rubber tubing. Even as he fell, however, the numbed, bumbling fingers of his left hand clawed his gun out. But he couldn't hold it, and it slipped from his grasp. He hit the floor limply and after what seemed like an interminable length of time, rolled over and sat up.

He stared at the man who had slugged him. "Shorty," he muttered thickly. It was the short bushy-haired little punk who had murdered the blonde with the sawed-off shotgun! He was grinning with the corners of his mouth turned down instead of up and he held a leather-covered sap in his hand.

Behind Shorty stood the bald-headed young punk, who wore a rumpled gray suit; right beside Baldy was the tall youth with the white, withered hand. Stealthily, as his brain cleared, Bart Miller slid his

hat over his gun on the floor beside him.

"Get his gun," the bald-headed punk said; his green eyes, on either side of his hooked nose, bored suspiciously.

"I haven't any," Miller mumbled.

Shorty laughed. He took a couple of steps and kicked at Bart's green hat. "I heard it hit the floor, smart guy," he said as he picked the gun up. He held it about a foot from Bart's chest. "Get up!" he snapped.

Slowly, Miller rose. The gun was on a level with his belt.

"What did she tell you?" Shorty snarled.

"Who?"

"Patty. That dame that was in your office this morning."

"Oh, the blonde, you mean?" Miller said slowly; he edged about an inch nearer the black, gaping muzzle of the gun in Shorty's hand. "She didn't tell me anything. Nothing at all."

Shorty made a noise in his throat, but the punk with the withered hand—evidently the product of a bad acid burn—

cried out: "See? See? What'd I tell you guys? You were all wrong about her!"

"Shut up!" Shorty eyed Miller, peering up like an evil little gnome. Miller edged imperceptibly nearer. "Gonna tell us what she said?" Shorty said.

Miller shrugged. "I've told you."

Shorty stared, his eyes growing brighter. Then his lips moved. "Okay, shamus," he said softly. "Okay. Have it your way. Only we're going to have to kill you, I guess..."

"You're kill-crazy," the tall punk lisped squeakily.

"Shut up—Ugh!" Shorty had shifted his eyes to speak to the punk with the badly scarred white hand. At that instant Bart Miller's left had made a short, blurred arc and he had twisted away from the muzzle of the gun. Shorty's feet shot clear of the floor and he crashed limply against the wall; then he slid down into a crumpled, prone position like a bag half filled with sand. Miller sprang. He wrested the gun from Shorty's nerveless fingers just as two other men burst into the room.

ONE WAS a tall, lanky man; the other was round-faced, cherubic, and was inches shorter than the other.

Miller stared tensely for a moment, then said with relief: "The cops! It took you long enough to get over here. You were in that rooming house across the street..."

"Why, it's Bart Miller," the tall, lanky detective drawled. "We never saw you come in here. Just these three guys. We were giving 'em plenty of time to do what they wanted; that's why we're late."

"And what were you doing here?" the cherub-faced detective demanded; he was frisking Baldy and the tall punk, had taken a gun from each. Miller threw him Shorty's leather-covered sap and the cheap, nickeled .38 he had found in an inside pocket, pocketing his own weapon. "What were you doing, here?" Cherub-Face repeated.

Miller shook his head. He was still kneeling by the crumpled Shorty. His sensitive fingers felt something in Shorty's watch pocket just under his narrow leather belt. "These are the guys who killed that

blonde in front of my office," he said; he extracted the hard little object from Shorty's pocket. His eyebrows leaped. It was a tiny gold monkey, speak-no-evil, completing the set!

He got up, hauling Shorty to his feet. He flung the little punk into a chair, where he began to recover consciousness. Miller went into more detail about the three punks, the blue Ford and the blonde. "And I think I've got everything now," he added. "Anyway, that tall guy'll spring. You liked that blonde, didn't you?" he demanded of the punk with the withered hand.

The tall youth, shaking, white-faced, said: "She liked me, I guess. Her name's Patty Bronski." *Patty Bronski, that name on the scrap of paper,* Miller thought. "She's from Cleveland," the tall punk added.

"Who are these guys?" the short detective with the pink, cherubic face demanded. "What's their names?"

The tall punk told him. He was Joe Bondi, he said. The short one was Shorty Vance; the other was Baldy Uber.

"You might as well come

out with all of it," Miller said quietly to Joe Bondi. "They've got you for Patty Bronski. You know what that means, don't you?"

"Yeah, yeah, I know," Joe Bondi whimpered. "I know. But—but—But I didn't want to do it!" he cried out wildly, suddenly. "They made me, I tell you! I didn't want to do it! She wasn't gonna squeal on us! She..."

"Shut up!" Shorty bellowed from the chair.

"You dirty cruts!" Joe Bondi yelled hysterically. "You got me into this! I didn't want to do it!"

"Maybe we can make it easier for you," the lanky detective suggested casually. "Who was Patty Bronski? Tell us more about her."

**S**HORTY started to curse, and Cherub-Face walked over and backhanded him across the mouth.

Joe Bondi, sweat streaming on his forehead, his acid-burned hand jerking like a white semaphore, let his frightened eyes flit from face to face. "Sure, sure," he rapped out shakily.

"Sure." He trembled and one corner of his mouth jerked. "I'll tell you. Patty was my girl friend, see? Or at least she thought she was. I liked her, all right but I didn't care too much—there were others. She came from Cleveland two or three days ago to get a job so that she could be near me. I'm from Cleveland, too, see? She came right here to this place because the old lady who lived here was a maiden aunt of hers—an old maid. The old lady didn't like Patty much—Patty was a poor relation, I guess—but she said Patty could stay until she found a job. She didn't introduce her around or nothing, like she was ashamed, of her, and..."

"All of which accounts for her fingerprints here," Bart Miller said.

"And we didn't have a chance with the fingerprints because Patty had just arrived and the old lady kept her hid," Cherub-Face said thoughtfully. "Nobody had seen her, even."

**B**ALDY UBER said something to Bondi; the lanky detective crunched his heel down on the bald-headed

punk's instep. Uber squealed with pain.

Joe Bondi went on. "Patty didn't know I was runnin' with these guys—we'd pulled about a dozen small jobs, see?—and she let it slip to me that her aunt had ten thousand dollars in cash in the place; the old lady had drawn it out of the bank and was gonna re-invest it or something. Well, I told Shorty and Baldy and they planned the job. I wasn't keen on it. Anyway, we pulled it—night before last. The old lady resisted, but we made her tell us where the dough was; then Baldy choked her and Shorty hit her with his blackjack..."

Shorty jumped up and started for Bondi, but Cherub-Face slammed him alongside the head with his gun barrel, crumpling the squat little punk again. "Go ahead," the cherub-faced little detective grunted at Joe Bondi.

"There ain't very much else. There was a couple of little gold monkeys on the mantel there, see? I took one, and Shorty took the other..."

"There were three," Bart Miller corrected; he joggled the three tiny monkeys in his

hand. "The other one must have been knocked into the fire place during the struggle with the old lady. This is the room where the struggle took place, isn't it?"

"It's where we found the body," the lanky detective said.

"Yeah, this is the room," Bondi corroborated. "But Patty met me downtown after it happened and found the gold monkey on me, see? I was a damn fool for carryin' it. Naturally she would know who it had belonged to; I should have sold it right away. Anyway, she had been here and seen what had happened and she made me tell the story. I had to tell her, didn't I? With that gold monkey and her knowin' what had happened, how could I have lied and made her believe me?"

"Well, when Shorty found out I had told her, he said she might squeal. I said he was crazy. He was, too. She was crazy about me and she believed me when I told her I had been forced to take part in the job and didn't have anything to do with the murder. She wasn't going to talk because

she didn't want to get me into trouble.

"But we began to trail her around— She didn't come back to this place to stay, of course. And she was scared to call the cops, even before she saw me that night, because she didn't have an alibi or anything and was afraid of what they might think of her. She stayed in a hotel on a back street, and the next morning we began to trail her around. I kept tryin' to tell those guys... But we picked her up yesterday and tailed her out to a place on Garrick Road.

Shorty had a sawed-off shotgun..."

**DID THE** place on Garrick Road belong to anybody by the name of Cressman?" Miller asked quickly

"Yeah, that was the name on the mailbox, I think..."

"Who was Patty with? Another blonde?"

"Some dame. I didn't notice whether she was blonde or not; she had a hat on."

"Okay," Miller said then. "Here it is. You finally trailed Patty and that big car with a chauffeur to my office this

[Turn Page]

The lobos who had murdered Johnny Wiman had shot his sister, Marj, too — but Marj hadn't been killed. So Steve Doust figured; they'd be back; they wouldn't dare let Marj live. Only — Mitch Bronson wouldn't kill Marj right away; Mitch liked to have some fun with a pretty girl...



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morning. Shorty and Baldy were convinced she might break any minute and spill the works...and Shorty let her have both barrels of the sawed-off shotgun when he saw his chance."

"That's right," Bondi said bleakly.

"Then when you found out she had been talking to a private detective, you thought you had better check up on me. When you tailed me over to this place, you thought I must surely know something, so you sneaked in and slugged me and so on. Now one more thing. Are you sure it was just ten thousand dollars you took from the old lady? It wasn't twice that much, was it?"

"It was around nine thousand..."

"Did you give Patty any of it?"

"Not a cent."

"Okay." Bart Miller flipped his hand. "They're all yours, boys," he said to the two detectives. "There's your two murders wrapped up in cellophane. Get these guys to cough up the nine thousand bucks, then dump the whole

business in Bullock's lap with my compliments!"

"Thanks," Cherub-Face said wryly.

"Oh, and by the way," Miller added. "What about the Cressmans? Have you..."

"I was talking to Bullock on the phone; nothing doing out there at all," Cherub-Face offered. "Of course, they haven't picked Grayson up yet; that's the real angle—Hey, what am I doing talking like this, Miller? And another thing; I asked you a long time ago why you were here. I haven't heard you sound off in reply yet..."

"I never miss a chance to help my fellow citizens," Miller intoned. "I learned that the fingerprints found here matched those of the girl killed in front of my office; so I thought it was my duty as a taxpayer..."

"He's always ramming that big nose of his into police business," the tall, lank detective said. "Forget it."

"Well, give me those little gold monkeys, anyway," Cherub-Face said, frowning a little. "Your duty as a taxpayer doesn't compel you to withhold evidence, you know!"

BART MILLER drove directly to his apartment house. He had more time now and wanted to get the twenty-six one thousand dollar bills and put them in his safe-deposit box. And then he had to find Grayson; or maybe see the Cressmans again. He had to do something. That twenty-six thousand dollar wad of currency was dynamite.

He unlocked the door of his apartment, threw the door back wide. Then his hand streaked for his right armpit.

"Don't try it, Miller," a calm voice said.

Bart's hand dropped.

"Step in, please. I've been waiting for you."

Slowly Miller stepped inside. "Close the door," was the command. Miller pushed the door shut.

"I knew you'd be returning here sooner or later..."

"What do you want?" Miller repeated.

Grayson got up; gone was his lazy, easy manner. "The twenty-six thousand dollars you took from my pocket!" he snapped.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Miller stalled.

[Turn Page]

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The automatic was thrust to within an inch of the private detective's chest. "Oh, yes, you do!" Grayson said flatly; his pushed-up, small-featured little face was taut and his sunken little eyes glowed. "The twenty-six thousand bucks was in my pocket when I smashed into your car. You took it; you're the only one who could have!"

"There's been a mistake somewhere..."

"Look. I'll even make you a proposition. You can have the odd thousand; just give me the twenty-five thousand bucks and forget all about everything."

**W**HY DID you leave after Patty Bronski was murdered?" Miller asked; Miller raised his hand and rubbed his thumb along his jawbone. Absently, a faraway look in his eye.

"I had to," Grayson clipped out. "I didn't want to get mixed up in that. I didn't have a thing to do with it. I still don't know what happened. Now stop stalling and hand it over."

"The money is in a safe-de-



posit box," Miller said. "I'm the only one who can get it. I've hidden the key." He reached up higher with his hand, scratched his head near his ear.

Grayson snarled. His teeth showed. His hand tightened around the gun.

Bart Miller's hand moved; he flipped off his hat and flung it squarely into the tight little face of the chauffeur. Flinging himself forward in a follow-up, his strong fingers caught Grayson's wrist. He twisted. There was a dry snap, an agonized yelp of pain, and the automatic fell.

**M**ILLER picked up the automatic. Grayson staggered back, a fine dew of sweat on his forehead, his face

a greenish-gray. He was clutching at his wrist, and the fingers of his right hand dangled lifelessly. Gently, Miller forced him back into the chair surrounded by a ring of cigaret butts. He stuck the automatic in his pocket.

"Now," he said softly, "you're going to talk, my friend. These new apartments are sound-proof. If I go to work on that wrist of yours, not a soul will know about it but we two."

Grayson was adamant for but a few seconds; then his

eyes began to slide a little in their sockets and his lips began to move. When he had finished, Miller got some fishing line and a thick roll of adhesive tape. He tied the chauffeur securely, taping his mouth. "I don't want anybody letting you go until a cop gets here," he explained.

When he had finished that, he dug up the twenty-six thousand and flicked the sheaf of bills under Grayson's popping eyes. "Now I'm going to make a call, after which I shall call

[Turn Page]

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the police. Sorry you can't smoke; that'll just about kill you, I guess."

FOR THE second time that day Bart Miller confronted Celia and Arthur Cressman. Celia was still in blue and the huge dog, Mr. Jim, crouched at her feet. They were in the same high-ceilinged room, and a fire was still hissing in the stone fireplace. Miller had shifted his gun to his side pocket.

"Grayson has talked—to me," Miller announced abruptly, looking Celia Cressman squarely in the eye. "You picked up Patty Bronski downtown yesterday and had agreed to pay Grayson twenty-six thousand dollars to kill her!"

Celia Cressman screamed wildly. "Get him, Mr. Jim!" she shrieked.

With a rumbling growl Mr. Jim came up off his haunches and sprang. Bart Miller twisted back and shot through his pocket. The slug caught the dog in the throat, whirling him, passing upward into the brain to drop the savage animal lifeless upon the rug.

"I guess . . ." Miller began, then stopped, his jaw sagging.

Arthur Cressman had produced a gun from beneath his blanket. He had it pointed at Bart.

"That will be enough, Miller!" he snapped. "Drop that gun!"

But Miller snatched at Celia, swung her by a fistful of dress in front of him. "Your move!" he countered. "I'll put a bullet through your shoulder unless you drop your gun inside of three seconds!"

Celia screeched, clawed at his face. Miller thrust her out from him, and she squirmed helplessly. He leveled his gun . . . And Arthur Cressman, with a sigh, tossed his weapon onto the floor near Mr. Jim, who had ceased kicking and twitching.

BART MILLER released Celia. She reeled away, flopped on a couch and began to weep great, painful sobs that she brought up from way down inside and which shook her entire body.

Miller picked up the gun on the floor, made sure Arthur Cressman had no other. Then he said:

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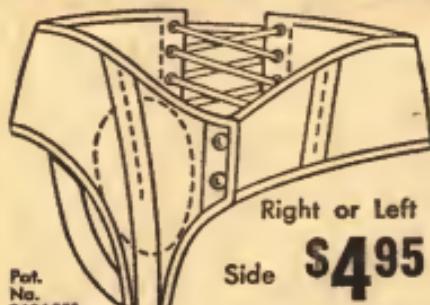
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"I came here to make absolutely sure what Grayson told me was correct. I guess it was . . ."

"Grayson? Yes, I suppose so." Arthur Cressman nodded wearily. "We needed money—a lot of money. That twenty-six thousand was mostly borrowed and scraped up. We were on the verge of becoming paupers."

"You and Celia are alone in the world," Miller said. "And all you had was a big life insurance policy on Celia. Naturally you couldn't kill her to cash it—but you had an idea. Celia picked up Patty Bronski, who looked very much like her, and brought her home on the pretense of giving her a job. She told Patty part of her job was to look like her, take her place at times. But you had hired Grayson to kill Patty.

"He was going to take her out in the car tonight, dressed in Celia's clothes, slug her, then roll the car down a steep embankment on a lonely road. Then he would set fire to the car. Celia would have disap-

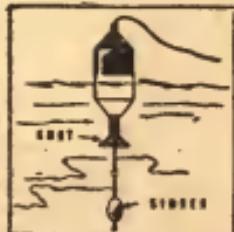
[Turn To Page 122]

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peared, of course. Patty, her build, wearing her clothes — who could say the charred corpse wasn't Celia Cressman's? You would cash the policy and join Celia in Mexico or somewhere in South America. Grayson could say, of course, that he had been stunned, but had managed to crawl out of the wreck—but hadn't been able to rescue his mistress."

**A GAIN** Arthur Cressman nodded wearily. "We'd been thinking of it for a long time. But we had to get a blonde with no dental work—who had perfect teeth like Celia's. Celia tried several and yesterday she finally accosted this Bronski girl and learned she had no dental work

[Turn To Page 124]

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whatsoever and her teeth were perfect, and that her disappearance wouldn't cause any great sensation. It was made to order. The Bronski girl had no suspicions . . ."

"But to convince Patty her job was the real McCoy you sent her out with Grayson in the limousine this morning. But Grayson smashed into the back of my car in front of my office, with Patty in the back seat, of course . . ."

"Yes, I know," Arthur Cressman said in the same quiet, toneless voice he had been using. "And you took the twenty-six thousand dollars out of Grayson's pocket—we had paid him in advance, on his insistence—and the Bronski girl was murdered. Grayson, not daring to stay after that, pulled away. He discovered that the twenty-six thousand was gone and correctly surmised what had happened. He called Celia on the phone and told her he would have to lay low as the police would most certainly be looking for him after what had happened, and



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[Turn To Page 126]

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that he was going to try to get the twenty-six thousand back, if we would make it worth his while. I made him a proposition, of course. I could have called the police in, but that might have dragged things out into the open—Er—why did you take the twenty-six thousand?

I'm curious about that. Obviously you didn't mean to keep it, or you wouldn't have done so much running around..."

"I took it because I have something inside me that makes me do things when I see something wrong," Miller said gravely. "I thought the dough was the Bishop ransom money. I've gotten into more trouble that way, acting on the spur of the moment. But supposing Grayson had tipped Patty

off and skipped with the money?"

**A**RTHUR CRESSMAN smiled a cold little smile. "Grayson has a small daughter. A little tike with long brown curls. His wife is dead, but he has this child. Maybe you saw her playing around. She would be a—er—hostage. If Grayson skipped with the money, sooner or later he would have to come back for the little girl. When he did, we would have him arrested as a thief. Who would believe his wild tale against the word of my sister and myself? No, if Grayson wanted the twenty-six thousand, he had to do the job."

"Didn't you think of blackmail?"

Cressman's lips moved contemptuously. "He would have had to find us to blackmail us—and he would be doing a very dangerous thing. He would be accusing himself of murder. Which was hardly likely."

Bart Miller eyed the Cressmans bleakly, then told

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them about Grayson trussed up in his apartment. "Now I'm going to tell Bullock to send a squad car out here, too," he added.

Celia suddenly stopped sobbing and raised her head. "We'll give you the twenty-six thousand if you don't do that," she said earnestly. "Just release Grayson and forget the whole business. Please! In God's name!"

"That's an idea, at that," Arthur Cressman put in. "You're not getting a thing out of this, Miller, you know. Keep the money!"

Miller shook his head as he walked toward the phone.

"Don't be a sap!" Celia Cressman cried desperately.

"I don't intend to be," Miller said, and picked up the phone.

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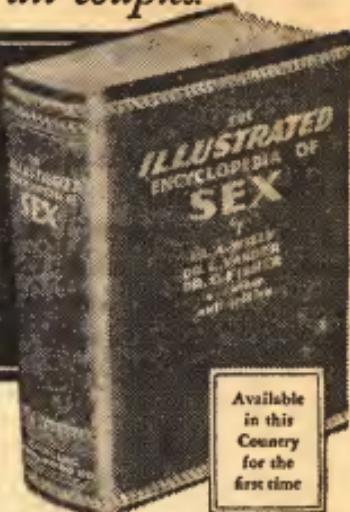
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# The Case of The Naked Niece

(continued from page 31)

could do nothing to raise my spirits. "What'll happen to the girl, Simon?" I asked finally, as the train thundered through a brief tunnel.

"With treatment she may turn out fine. Now that the cause of her obsession is known, it will be easier."

"But how did you know it all?"

"There had to be a reason why June Fammage did a strip every time she got excited or emotionally upset. If she wasn't a nympho or a sex nut, it seemed at least possible that she tore off her clothes because of some deeply-buried experience in her childhood. When I heard about the old murder it fit pretty well. She'd gotten blood on her clothes that night at the scene of her father's murder."

"It still could have been the mother who did it—or June."

He nodded. "But Uncle Oscar seemed just too protective of her. You remember when he hired us there were definite instructions not to look into the

Elliot killing—and he never even mentioned the earlier crime. He only wanted us to keep June away from the police—where psychiatric treatment would have brought out the story of the earlier murder."

"So you threw the wine on her to shock her into remembering that scene in the bedroom."

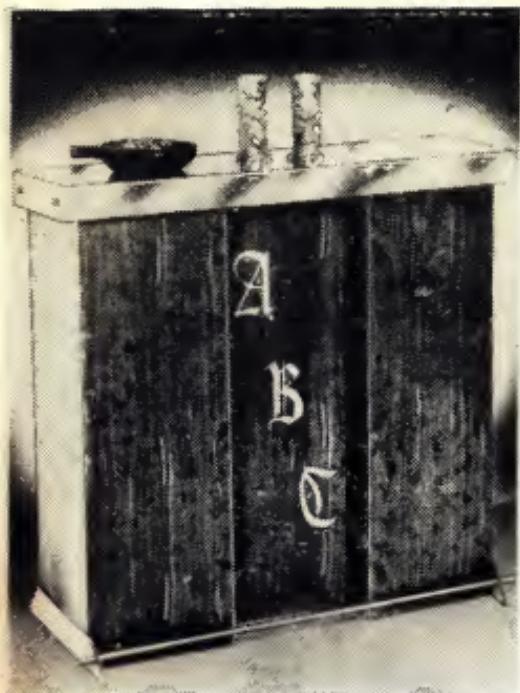
Simon nodded, gazing dully out the window. "It was one way to do it, not the best—but one way."

"What was this stuff about sex customs in Sparta?"

"It was common in Sparta for men to share their wives with their brothers. But the brothers Fammage didn't go along with that old custom, apparently."

"So we get no fee for two days' work." The thought of it added to my depression. "And the only girl I got to meet was half nuts."

The train thundered on, and Simon only smiled.



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